

# *The Joyous Adventurer*

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# The Joyous Adventurer

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# THE JOYOUS ADVENTURER

## PART I

"First, you and I, just as we are in this room; and the moment we get below that surface, the unutterable absolute itself! Doesn't that show a singularly indigent imagination? Isn't this brave universe made on a richer pattern, with room in it for a long hierarchy of beings?"

Professor WILLIAM JAMES.  
(*"A Pluralistic Universe."*)

## CHAPTER I

THERE was a great scattering of papers, and Lady Condor emerged out of the Assembly Rooms at Fairbridge into the clear sunlight of a late April afternoon. It was sunlight of a very searching description; it showed up the rouge and powder on Lady Condor's face and the black lines round her shrewd, kindly eyes. It picked out in her golden hair a strange green tinge. Nevertheless she faced it without flinching. Undoubtedly her smile was own brother to it. She smiled, as a child smiles at something it likes, at the gorse on the Common facing the Assembly Rooms. After a winter of few cold winds and little frost it was in bloom early and in amazing perfection.

"Isn't it quite too lovely!" she exclaimed to the imposing Archdeacon who escorted her. "And do smell

it! What is it like? Something we eat—yes. And who was it went down on his knees and thanked God, the first time he saw a field of gorse in bloom? Not Luther—no—but someone beginning with an L——”

At this moment the south-west wind whirled round the corner, caught up the papers which Lady Condor had dropped, and carried them down the road in a cloud of dust.

“Oh! My papers!” she cried, and held out helplessly a pair of white tightly gloved hands. She dropped in the effort a pocket handkerchief and a blue silk scarf. “And I have promised to sign all of them, and send them to Dudley Rancid, who will put them in his waste-paper basket unless we send enough——”

The Archdeacon descended into the road and in intervals of mastering his hat and apron endeavoured to collect the scarf and handkerchief. The interruption was not altogether unwelcome. Certainly Luther would not have been guilty of any such extravagant behaviour concerning gorse as that to which Lady Condor had alluded, but on the other hand he could not remember what celebrity had been, and the Archdeacon prided himself on his general knowledge.

“Beginning with an L,” he said to himself, as he strove after the scarf. “L—um—Laud—Latimer—Lucullus——”

“Ah! you nearly got it there!” called Lady Condor, who had not ceased to talk. “But where were we? Oh yes, the papers and getting them signed. And what a dreadful man—quite nice looking—he reminded me of George Alexander. Poor dear—he was my favourite actor—I shall never forget him as Macbeth—or was that Irving? I remember he had not good knees for a kilt. But who was he? The speaker this afternoon I mean.



I cannot think of his name—something beginning with Bo. Not well selected—no. He told us the truth—why is it that the truth is always unpleasant? Just like medicines! Why should they be? One must have a sweet after all of them—I hold my nose too—Ah, you have got it!”

The Archdeacon had secured one end of the blue scarf, and was struggling against the wind for possession of the other. The handkerchief had joined the papers farther along the road, and was pursuing its downward path in the dust with apparent enjoyment. He gave it up, also the attempt to control the scarf, and returned to Lady Condor with it floating behind him like a banner. He was rather breathless after his exertions. Picking up or catching things was not really suitable for an Archdeacon, or for a man of his figure, but Lady Condor was privileged. Indeed men had stooped and fetched and carried for her since she could lisp.

She was still talking; at the moment of his return again about the Speaker at the Meeting. A Meeting held to protest against the Worn Horse Traffic with the Continent.

“But who was he? And who got him to come? Not well selected—no. He told us the truth—because they were facts—who was it said you can’t get away from facts——?”

“My dear lady,” interrupted the Archdeacon with decision, “in my opinion he went much too far in stating the case. Dreadful things have occurred through this Traffic, regrettable things, I am the first to own it. But to call the English people cruel is on the face of it absurd. Absurd!” he repeated with warmth. “Also how are we to know that such things are going on unless we are told? However, I hope my few words in conclusion

when I thanked our Chairman put the matter quite straight in the public mind——”

“Oh! there is a man catching my papers,” interrupted Lady Condor. “I do hope he will catch the handkerchief too—one of my best—I cannot afford to lose them now as I used to do. Such a nuisance—but where were we? Oh—yes—but if it was the truth? So unpleasant of course. But one does taste it sometimes. I did this afternoon—really I did not like it at all. Though your spoonful of jam after it was very helpful. What an excellent tea they gave us—oh—yes—I was one of the hostesses, wasn’t I? I sent £1. But who managed it all? Mrs. Leicester Pocock? Ah! That man has got my handkerchief! And all the papers too——”

At this moment a fair, very plump little man came out of the Assembly Rooms. He was almost well enough dressed to suggest a model figure in a tailor’s window. Only his undoubted *air de race* saved him. This was Mr. Arthur Fothersley, squire of Mentmore village, which lay on the border of the Condor estate, and a very old friend.

His round pink face wore an expression of anxiety which broke into a smile of relief when he saw Lady Condor.

“Ah, there you are!” he exclaimed. “I feared you might have started without me. Mrs. Rancid again! She seized me just as I was following you and began to tell me all her last London specialist’s new treatment for her rheumatism. Impossible to interrupt her——”

The Archdeacon moved down the steps to take Lady Condor’s handkerchief and papers from the man who had retrieved them. He was fond of speaking of himself with Archidiaconal facetiousness as a second Sherlock



Holmes, and prided himself on being able to tell you a man's profession from his appearance with almost as great accuracy as could that celebrated diviner by induction. This man, however, puzzled him. He wore a black, clerical-looking coat, good of its kind, and one that the Archdeacon might even have worn himself, but beneath it, incongruously enough, appeared a pair of gaiters and shooting boots. On his head was a broad-brimmed felt hat of the Cowboy description which would not have disgraced a scarecrow. He wore no tie, though his shirt and collar, so the Archdeacon noted with surprise, were quite clean. He had fierce blue eyes, a crooked nose, and a truculent beard curving upwards into a point. He was no longer young—about fifty—the Archdeacon decided. He might possibly be a game-keeper who had lost his place—through drink. The Archdeacon also found the word “poacher” running through his mind. He noted with kindly tolerance that the man did not raise his hat when he arrived at the steps. “Ah, socialistic tendencies,” he said to himself, and then he received one of the shocks of his life.

Wholly unmindful of the Archdeacon's dignified presence ready to receive the papers and handkerchief, the man walked up the steps and stuffed them uncereemoniously into Lady Condor's hands.

“Hullo, Marion!” he said. “Still dropping things all over the place!”

The voice was a well-bred, imperious voice, the manner that of an intimate. The Archdeacon staggered.

“Good Heavens! It's James Godolphin!” exclaimed Lady Condor, and promptly dropped all the papers and the handkerchief again. The latter, catching in one of her many brooches, waved gaily in the breeze.

“Well, I'm not going to pick them up this time,” said

James Godolphin, and he put his hands in his pockets while the Archdeacon and Mr. Fothersley, assisted by lesser lights who were beginning to dribble slowly out of the Assembly Rooms, collected the papers once more.

"But what are you doing here? Were you at the Meeting? I thought you never went to Meetings. So wise—but so wanting in your duty to the Public. A man in your position ought—James, you have forgotten to put a tie on," said Lady Condor all in one breath, stopping on a note of horror.

"Why should I wear a tie? Hasn't the shirt got a button and buttonhole?"

"But at a Public Meeting, James——"

"I was not at the Meeting, Marion. It is not necessary to go to a Meeting to know that we are carrying on——"

"But, James, you would simply have loved the Speaker. He was so rude. I cannot remember his name—something that began with 'Bo. He told us the unvarnished truth—just like you do——"

"I don't. I've washed my hands——"

"Well, you always *did*, James. And the Truth should remain at the bottom of her well, as it says in the Bible—or is it in 'Alice in Wonderland'? But where *have* you been, James? Not to London, I hope——"

"Why not to London? If you have been given a Professorial Chair you must sit in it sometimes, you know."

"But without a tie, James——"

Here the Archdeacon interrupted the duet. It seemed the only possible way to be on in the scene as an Archdeacon certainly should be.

"Pray present me to Professor Godolphin, dear Lady Condor," he said ceremoniously. "It is an honour I have long looked forward to."



"Errmph!" said the Professor, looking less like a Professor and more like a Poacher than ever.

"When may we expect another of your magnificent contributions to our Historical Literature?" asked the Archdeacon, undaunted. Indeed he had a profound respect for Godolphin's work. Also he suspected that he showed more breadth of mind in this matter than did most of his colleagues. "I assure you I for one look upon them as an Event. If I remember rightly it is rather more than three years since 'Comparative History' appeared, so I think we may perhaps hope that you will soon——"

"Why should I?" snapped the Professor, and glared at him. "Have you ever listened, any of you? No! A nice mess you're in too! Well, don't blame me. I told you what had happened before, and why it happened. I——"

"James," broke in Lady Condor, "I've just remembered we are not on speaking terms. Of course! That is why I have not seen you for such a long time. What was it we quarrelled about? I think it was about something beginning with a P. Could it have been Politics—no—I believe it was Pigs. Something to do with Cross Breeding—and they were all spotted red and black—like Noah's Ark Pigs——"

"Berkshire and Tamworth," said the Professor and laughed. He had an unexpected and infectious laugh. Everyone joined in. "Well, I can't tell you what we quarrelled about, Marion. You always were a most unreasonable woman, and you never would listen to the truth——"

"But I did this afternoon," Lady Condor interrupted him once more. "Poor old Mr. Wallis wanted to go out. But so awkward when you are on the Platform.

The short skirts are so awkward too. They ought to make special Platform Frocks. I must suggest it to Worth. The back benches don't understand, you see. And so many women don't know how to sit down—no. But where were we? Oh yes—the Speech. Did Mr. Bo . . . I cannot remember the name—say we were not worth one farthing or was it the two sparrows? Something like that——”

“I deprecate very much the introduction of Holy Writ and the name of the Almighty into a speech of that description,” said the Archdeacon. “I am sure you agree with me, Mr. Godolphin?”

“If God's anywhere He's everywhere,” said the Professor. “Not sure He's anywhere myself. You are. Why not at the Meeting? Errmph!”

“One must use discrimination,” said the Archdeacon judiciously. It was a useful phrase. “This young man had none. The speech would have been admirable addressed to a low class audience. Exactly what they like. But to address such an audience as was assembled this afternoon in that—er—flamboyant style was a grave error both of taste and judgment. And of course to accuse Us of being cruel——”

“So you are,” snorted the Professor, with such suddenness that it caused the Archdeacon to heel over like a ship checked in full sail. “Beastly cruel, all of you. Don't care a hang how you torture anything if you get a little money or amusement out of it. Damnably cruel! Wouldn't mind so much if you had the courage of your brutality. Always denying it—saying you're bubbling over with justice and mercy. Errmph!”

He glared at Lady Condor, and then suddenly smiled. She was looking at him with round eyes and her mouth open like a scolded child.

"My dear James, I had forgotten how dreadful you are. Don't take any notice of him, Archdeacon Pinniger. He—— Ah! now I remember! Of course! We quarrelled because I told you you were not fit for Polite Society—I knew it began with a P. Not Pigs—no—Polite Society—And I was quite right——"

"Not at all!" snapped the Professor. "Polite Society is not fit for Me."

"Well, at any rate we are friends again. And you must drive home with me in the car. Arthur," she smiled at Mr. Fothersley in high good humour, "you will not mind sitting back, will you?"

Mr. Fothersley was delighted to sit anywhere if it helped to cement the renewed friendship. He disliked his friends quarrelling, especially when they were related. "Always the worst quarrels," he would say. And this one had been so silly. Really about nothing at all, only they would both talk at once, which always led to complications.

"Oh—my scarf. How *did* it get there?" Lady Condor was continuing. "Put it in your pocket, dear Arthur, until we get home. And my papers. Yes, I have promised to sign them all. Good-bye, Archdeacon Pinniger, and thank you so much for your charming little speech. It smoothed everything over so cleverly."

"Errmph!" grunted the Professor, and skilfully banged the door of the car on her retreating back and still flowing conversation. Then he turned to Mr. Fothersley left standing in the road. They had been schoolboys together, and Godolphin grinned at him much as he would have done in those old days if he had outwitted another boy. And Mr. Fothersley's cherubic little face broke into an answering grin, just as it might have done long ago. He was conscious of a desire to wink. Very odd.



A thing he had not done for years. A thing indeed he objected to. Very odd—the effect James always had on him.

“She will be wanting me to go into Polite Society beginning with a P again,” said the Professor, and did wink. “We remember her since she was in petticoats, don’t we? Hard to refuse.”

He waved a hand at Lady Condor’s protesting face as she struggled to get the window of the car down.

“Done you this time, Marion!” he shouted, to the interest and amusement of the little crowd of the less mighty which had gathered, and strode away down a side street.

Archdeacon Pinniger expressed, to a group of highly interested ladies, his regret that a man so brilliantly gifted should be so very peculiar. “Something in the Family? Oh well! Well! One does not talk of these things.” They were all so entertained that they forgot how much annoyed they had been with the afternoon’s Speaker, and the Archdeacon found the task of smoothing the paths of the righteous, one peculiarly his own, considerably lightened.

But Lady Condor was really vexed.

“That was too bad of James!” she exclaimed, as the motor curved away from the door of the Assembly Rooms. “I did want to talk to him. And now I don’t know when I shall see him again. You know he will never come to the Castle, and it is impossible to get to him. There is only a cart track up to the house—dreadfully neglected—all through the woods, you know. So I can’t go in the motor or even in the bath chair, and there it is! You see I had almost forgotten his existence—poor dear—one is so dreadfully busy. But when he appeared quite suddenly like that just now— Do imagine

such a thing as going to London without a tie on! And he must have been at a Meeting of some sort because he took the Chair. What must everybody have thought! But where were we? Oh yes—when I saw him again I knew how fond of him I really am—at the back of everything you know——”

The Eternal Child in Woman was very visible in the queer but delightful make-up that was Marion Condor. When she was really distressed you longed to comfort her.

“I must own I always find, when I see him, that I have a sneaking fondness for James myself,” acknowledged Mr. Fothersley. “But really his opinions did become outrageous. Outrageous!” he repeated warmly and blew his nose. “Nothing was sacred to him. Neither Church, nor State, not even our Great Traditions. The Royal Family certainly I never heard him actually speak against; but that was only because he said ‘the poor things could not help themselves.’ You do not expect a man of good family to say such things. And during the War he was impossible, really impossible. I remember one evening when dining at the Duke’s. General Bowmander actually coupled James’s name with that of Bernard Shaw, and said they ought both to be put up against the wall and shot. A fiery little man, of course, but——”

“Red-headed,” said Lady Condor. “I sometimes wonder if I had married him—— Not the General—no. James. He was very much in love with me once—poor dear——”

“We all were, Marion,” murmured Mr. Fothersley.

Lady Condor smiled, a reminiscent smile.

“Men are curious things—very curious,” she murmured. “But where were we? Oh, yes—poor dear James! And if I had married him. I wonder what he

would have been like now? Not one bit like he is, you know. And I should never have allowed a beard—never. Isn't it funny when one thinks of it? I should have married him, I believe—if Condor had not asked me. He nearly didn't, I remember, because there was that Foljambe girl. A Cat! Soft and furry and cuddly with claws." There was a gleam of remembered warfare in her eyes. "Curious things—men—very curious—I have never quite been able to understand them—in this matter of Cats you know. And I have had a great deal of experience."

She fell into sudden but evidently profound thought.

"None more, Marion. None more," responded Mr. Fothersley warmly.

Lady Condor emerged from her thought-depths with the same suddenness with which she had fallen into them and exclaimed:

"Men talk about we Women—Well! ! !" She threw out both hands helplessly, scattered everything she had on her lap to right and left, and looked at Mr. Fothersley. "Well!" she repeated. "But where were we? Oh—yes—poor dear James. But of course when Condor asked me there was no one else in it." She smiled her wonderful smile. It shone with something dazzling—was it tears?—in its brightness. "Well, thank God, we have been very happy. Though Heaven knows which of us has been the greater trial to the other! But where were we? If I had married James—Yes. Or if his poor little wife had lived. He married her because she was so much in love with him, you know—quite a good reason—and she was very well off too. Her father made a fortune in candles, I think—or was it a tan yard—something that smelt, I know. Or if the poor little still-born baby had been alive——"



"A boy, was it not?" asked Mr. Fothersley, who liked to get a word in edgeways sometimes.

"A boy—yes—such a beautiful boy too. I saw them in their coffin. It upset me terribly, I remember. Condor took me to Monte Carlo to get it out of my mind. And poor dear James went to the funeral in a red tie. It shocked people dreadfully, I remember—and of course no wonder——"

The car whirled in at one of the many entrances to Mentmore Castle, and Lady Condor broke off to wave a kindly greeting to the curtsying gate-keeper. She looked out at the great forest stretching away on either hand, indescribably radiant in the sunlight.

"Of course it is very beautiful," she said with apparent inconsequence, "but I would not care to bury myself in it always, would you, dear Arthur? So I suppose he was very much in love too—though he never showed it."

"You mean James?" asked Mr. Fothersley.

"Yes, Arthur, of course I do. And yet I remember distinctly when I was trying to tell him how sorry I was—it is so difficult, isn't it?—he said: 'Don't be a fool, Marion,' and asked me about the new motor. All motors were new then—but odd—wasn't it? But here we are! And where are my glasses? I am sure I had them when we left the Assembly Rooms. I distinctly remember looking at Mrs. Horace Jones, in a new cloak like a zebra, in the High Street. Oh, there they are—and how on earth did they get there—and not broken! What a mercy, dear Arthur, you are so plump. Don't bother about anything else, the servants will collect them. And oh, there is a telegram. Now what can this be? from Condor, I suppose."

She tore open the little orange envelope without ceasing to talk, a voluminous, many-coloured figure in the doorway of the noble grey stone building.

Mr. Fothersley waited with polite interest, indeed with open curiosity. It was one of the salient features of his general make-up.

Lady Condor gave a little cry of pleasure.

"Dear Hawkhurst has a daughter!" she exclaimed. "Now is not that delightful? I began to think that generation would have nothing but boys—just as mine had, except for me. Both going on well and she is to be called Marion Rosamund Helen Emily."

But Marion Rosamund Helen Emily christened herself Ishtar, that being the nearest she could get to "Sister," as soon as she could speak, and Ishtar she has remained up to the present time. Also she has remained the only daughter of that generation of the great Condor family.

The Professor made his way home contentedly muttering to himself. It was not until the long hill was passed that he was able to breathe freely.

People! He could not stand them. Every year it was becoming worse. Or People were. And they swarmed in towns. Swarmed.

Yet the Professor was a kindly—even a gentle—person. In his little house high among the uplands of the great Condor Forests he lived peacefully with a dog, two cats, a donkey, a large family of robins, and his housekeeper. The nearer he got to it the more benign became the Professor's aspect, and the more his resemblance to a poacher dwindled.

People! Too many of them. Far too many. They congregated. Fortunately. . . . Birth restrictions. . . .

He turned out of the roadway and passed into the quiet fields.

Green and cool and peaceful. No People.

The fierceness died out of his eyes. His beard assumed an almost benevolent aspect. He followed the



path out of the fields into the young growth of trees on the border of the forest. Every imaginable shade of living green glowed around him on a carpet of Wind Flowers.

Pleasant, very pleasant. And cool.

He took off his hat, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a large, bright red handkerchief. The Professor was fond of red. The sunlight made a nimbus of silver round his head, and softened its fighting carriage. His mind resumed its normal train of thought. Something coherent emerged out of the indistinct continuous murmur.

"Yes . . . of course . . . a fact . . . extraordinary fact. . . . Throughout History. . . . Minorities always in long run controlled Majorities . . . aim of State . . . greatest good. . . . greatest number. . . . Ptch! greatest good. . . . " At that moment he said it absolutely. " . . . Minorities always—in long run. . . . Of course they had. . . . "

"Of course they do!" said the Professor and put his amorphous hat in his pocket, laid his handkerchief on the top of his head, and continued his way.

Two young rabbits inspected the handkerchief later on where it fell in the pathway, but could make nothing of it. A jackdaw however, who discovered it later on, prized it greatly, it was of the best silk, and took it home with him in triumph.

The Professor continued his way tranquilly. The thesis he was propounding in his brain progressed also. Higher and higher he climbed and the green glory in which he moved unheeding deepened with the evening coming. The birds fluted gay and careless songs to each other. The woodpigeon cooed in the fir-tree tops. Little grey-brown rabbits scuttled across his path. None of

them paid the smallest attention to the figure moving up and up the pathway muttering learned words and grumbling amiably to itself. Neither did the Professor take the smallest notice of them. As he moved in and out of the sunlight and shadow, so his silvered hair shone or darkened round the bald crown of his head. A nimbus of light, coming and going, flickering here and there. Within the Mind continued to work.

"These Minorities . . . um . . . what do we find. . . . Good men . . . so-called . . . always at head of Minorities . . . of course. . . . What do we find . . . always done more harm than good . . . far more harm . . . um . . . far more harm. . . ."

"Of course," said the Professor. "Far more *Harm!* God bless my soul, what's that?"

His foot had struck against something in the path, something soft. He had struck it heavily because he did not lift his feet when walking, and as he struck it a thin, piercing wail rent the air—and every bird in the wood seemed to go wild with fear and anger.

"God bless my soul!" said the Professor again. "It isn't . . ."

No, it couldn't be. Of course not! What . . . ? How . . . ? Who . . . ? No, it couldn't be . . . but it was . . . undoubtedly it was. . . .

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Professor, for the third and last time. "It's a baby!"

The baby, as if satisfied to be recognised, ceased to yell and looked at the Professor with a pair of most extraordinary eyes. They were not blue, they were not green, they were not brown, and yet they were all three. Also they looked at the Professor with almost uncanny intelligence. It was wrapped in a weather-worn shawl which had once been blue, but had extracted one leg and

both arms, so was comparatively free in its immediate neighbourhood.

The Professor glared down at it, and held his beard tightly in his left hand, a habit with him in moments of crisis.

It was not the right place to leave a young infant. No . . . not the right place. Public thoroughfare. There were Byelaws. . . . The County Council dealt. . . . Obstruction of Traffic. . . . Why? . . . ? How . . . ? Very easily injured . . . fatally injured. . . .

The Professor bent down and peered closer. The baby chuckled. It put out a purposeful hand and clutched after the pointed red-gold and silver thing which had suddenly swum into its ken.

"Not damaged . . . um . . . lucky!" said the Professor. He removed his beard out of range, stepped carefully over the baby and went on his way.

The baby made several ineffectual grabs at the strange object passing across its line of vision, and failing to catch hold of any part of it started to yell again, and once more the chorus of angry, frightened birds accompanied it. The Professor pursued his way for some fifty yards unmoved. He tried to regain his disturbed line of thought. "Minorities . . . um . . . far more harm . . . far more. . . ." Then he paused.

Perhaps . . . yes. . . . Dropped by accident . . . um . . . The female . . . um . . . probably mother . . . discover loss . . . return. Or it might be a child. Children were careless. . . . Left things about . . . dropped things . . . um . . . Marion. . . . Very careless. Ought he to wait? Suppose no one returned? Very careless. Or perhaps left on purpose. . . . Things happened.

And then . . . "I can't leave a baby," said the Professor. Whatever had happened he ought to remain.



Common humanity . . . um . . . far more harm. . . .

He sighed and felt in both his pockets. There were books there. His face brightened. There was also his hat, which puzzled him, so he put it back. Then he made himself as comfortable as he could on a convenient stump, near the baby but not too near, and settled down to the largest of the three books. A companionable looking volume in brown vellum nearly black with much use.

The baby settled down too and played with a surprisingly friendly dragonfly who came glancing up from the little stream near by, which guggled and chuckled and made cool and pleasant noises on its way from the pond up above to the pond down below. When it left an old Mother Rabbit came and poked a nose twitching with curiosity and interest into the baby's face, and the baby dabbled its fingers in the rabbit's soft fur and crowed with glee. Then it fell suddenly sound asleep, about the same hour that the birds began to settle down and the shadows came and folded things up in their soft grey arms.

Nobody else came, and the Professor read on until it became too dark to see well.

"Light . . . very bad to-night," he muttered, and felt about half automatically for his study lamp. Finding nothing there he looked up and blinked.

"God bless my soul," he said. "Yes . . . the baby. . . ."

It was still there.

He stood up and blinked again. It was rapidly getting dark. The third possibility was correct.

He did not like it. He did not like it at all. Annoying . . . very annoying. Left on purpose . . . um . . . deserted . . . birth-rate . . . restricted birth-rate . . . yes . . . necessary . . . certainly . . . very necessary. . . .

He prepared to handle the child.

A delicate job. Was there not some physiological reason why it should be done by a skilled hand? Some part of the anatomy . . . The neck. . . He must be on his guard. He had never touched a baby before. The whole thing was absurd.

He peered at the baby again from a different angle. It certainly looked intelligent. It could not be a newborn infant. At any rate the thing had to be done.

He gathered the corners of the shawl and drew them tightly together. He lifted the bunch carefully; it might have been a shawlful of eggs. The baby did not struggle. It opened its eyes and appeared as wide awake as it had been sound asleep a second before, but it made no protest. Neither did the birds. The Professor clutched his bundle with renewed firmness, holding it in front of him, and went on his way. Unnoticed a soft white presence flitted beside him above the undergrowth in and out of the shadowy tree trunks on his left. It was a white owl. At the edge of the wood it disappeared, and the Professor stepped through a gate into the fields which lay on the east side of his house. Two small fields sufficient to afford grazing for two gentle Jersey cows and an old donkey. Why the donkey, no one quite knew. He had been given to the Professor long ago by some one who wanted a home for him, and he had lived the life of a gentleman with the Professor ever since. His name on arrival had been Ned, but Gerry the Cowboy, who did not approve of a donkey living as an aristocrat, had christened him King Edward.

He came out of the shadows to welcome the Professor and displayed an embarrassing interest in the bundle he carried. Also, the Professor's arms were so tightly clipped to his side, in the supreme effort to carry the bundle

safely, that King Edward could not get his nose under either of them as was his wonted custom when escorting the Professor across the field.

"Shoo!" said the Professor. "Sho-oo, stupid. It's a baby. Sho-oo. Go away."

He was hot with the terrible exertion of carrying the infant. King Edward refused to be shoo-ed away. What was he doing with this ridiculous bundle? The whole thing was absurd. Absurd! He got through the second gate with difficulty, hampered by King Edward at every turn, and at last arrived in front of the house.

Small and old and grey and brown it melted into the spring wood background almost as part of it. Originally it had been a keeper's cottage on the Condor estate but had fallen into disuse, and been given to the Professor for his lifetime by his cousin Anthony Henry William Fitzhugh, Earl of Condor, who, like Mr. Fothersley, had always had a sneaking fondness for brilliant, wayward, hot-tempered James Godolphin.

That was the time when he had just married, with the petrifying suddenness with which he did everything in his youth, and he and his small wife enjoyed themselves vastly in their early married days renovating the little old place, building on a big beautiful living-room, and making a garden. They planted and sowed possible and impossible things in every possible and impossible place, and they thrived. They collected together a queer menagerie of birds and beasts, both wild and domesticated, and were supremely and absurdly happy. One June evening they walked together in their garden, hand in hand as their ridiculous habit was, and looked at their poppies, and he said, "Why, miracles happen every day, beloved," and the next evening she had slipped away beyond the stars, with a small son to bear her company.



The house had dormer windows in the roof, and latticed windows under the eaves, and a deep porch. It was built of old rose-red bricks, and had a roof of rose-red tiles, well covered with gold and silver lichen. It had a sweet briar hedge in front, and a wicket-gate with a hatch in the hedge, and a flagged pathway from the hedge to the porch—in fact it had everything that a little house in the forest ought to have.

In the field in front were two apple trees, and on the grass plot inside the garden on the right of the house was a pear tree in full blossom. Beside the pear tree grew a yew, and beyond the pear tree a beech tree with all its gold shucked leaves waiting *l'heure exquise*. Snow-white, blue-black, and gold, against a mist of fairy green. Very wonderful indeed.

A dog came out to greet him, as a dog should in all well-regulated houses, and made as much fuss of him as though he had been away for twenty years. The dog was a sheep dog, and he had one brown eye and one blue, and his name was Wanky. He barked, and waltzed round and round the Professor, and jumped over the gate and back again, and behaved generally as if suffering from delirium. Then he sat down suddenly and began to bite fleas at the end of the back which is nearest the tail.

The Professor smiled as he unlatched the gate. He was always pleased to get home. And then he frowned. Across the flagged pathway travelled a slug. - An elongated white slug, about his evening business with the young mallow and lupin just beginning to show above the earth, and very delicate feeding.

Now the Professor was a gardener, that sort of gardener who is born not made, and he laid his bundle down without ceremony and went on a slug hunt. A slug

hunt he knew is as enthralling as any other hunt, and for quite half an hour it engrossed the Professor to the exclusion of all other things. Then, when he had thoroughly divested each border of every traceable slug by means which shall be nameless, he stepped into the porch supperwards. And immediately there arose from the eaves above a clamour of angry and worried birds.

The Professor looked up, immediately interested.

"The swallows," he said, "are back."

Wonderful . . . very wonderful . . . Migratory habit. . . One word for all we don't understand. . . Nature. A piercing wail from the bundle on the path interrupted his train of thought. The birds shrieked at him.

"God bless my soul!" said the Professor for the fourth and last time that evening. "The baby!"

Then he shouted "Kathleen" at the top of his voice and blew his nose violently.

A small, grey woman came out of a door on the left of the little hall and stood looking at him out of the shadows.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed the Professor as if he had not at all expected it. "Errmph! There is a baby, Kathleen, on the path outside. It would be well to bring it in."

The Professor's housekeeper was an Irishwoman from Galway and she was a silent woman. Now when you meet a silent woman from Galway beware of her. This one had married an Englishman named Jones. She had had no children, and she had had a bad husband. That is very hard on a woman. The handy man of the place, who was a Scotsman, called her Mistress Jones, so everybody called her the same, except the Professor, and he called her by her Christian name which was Kathleen, and she was as unlike a Kathleen to look at as could well be.



She did not appear in the least surprised at the advent of a baby on the Professor's pathway. No one who had lived with him for twenty years could possibly be surprised at anything. She looked past him up the pathway and there certainly was a bundle there which might be a baby. Also it was emitting a crescendo of piercing yells.

Mistress Jones slipped past the Professor without a word and had the bundle in her arms almost before he had finished speaking. He watched her movements with interest from the door. The baby ceased to yell.

"Instinct," said the Professor, "is undoubtedly beyond Thought."

Yet what is it? No difficulty. . . . None whatever. Nature's plan . . . um . . . to prevent Extinction of Race. . . . Yet what better thing . . . um . . . what better thing. . . .

"Where would you be finding a baby?" asked Mistress Jones, moving towards him. The baby had contentedly become part of her.

"In the middle of the pathway," said the Professor. "From deduction I conclude it must have been left there on purpose. In case someone had dropped it by accident I waited. . . . Errmph! For some considerable time . . . yes. . . ."

Mistress Jones unwrapped the faded shawl. But for that covering the baby was stark naked. A slim, shining, beautiful thing. A man child.

One tiny fist was clenched, and Mistress Jones opened it. It held a copper-coloured beech leaf from the woodland carpet. Beyond that to show where it came from, nothing.

The leaf fluttered softly to the ground and the small fingers dabbled in the Professor's beard. It was now within range while the Professor inspected.

"What age is the child, Kathleen?" he asked.

"I would be thinking he is about four months, the craythure," she said, and stroked the soft down on the baby's head. It was the same colour as the beech leaf.

"I am no judge," said the Professor, "but it appears to me a healthy, well-proportioned infant . . ." He paused, and stroked the baby's head too, gingerly, with one finger. The baby's wandering gaze fixed itself on the Professor. Certainly it had curious eyes. Intelligent. . . .

"Unless it should be claimed," the Professor continued, "of which I see little chance . . ."

He paused again, and Mistress Jones looked at him with a queer light in her eyes.

"I propose to keep it," the Professor shouted with extreme suddenness. "Errmph!"

And he put his hat in its proper place (a most unusual thing), on the right hand peg behind the door, and glared at her.

For a full minute she did not move.

The baby put a wandering hand up over the breast that had never mothered, up to the throat about which no baby fingers had played when it was round and full. Finally it caught at the dull grey hair on the bent head above it, and chuckled. Mistress Jones sat down on the nearest chair and the Professor stared at her with bewilderment, with apprehension, with dismay. For she had suddenly burst into tears, and was sobbing and crying as if her heart would break, and the dog was licking her face, with its forepaws mixed up with the baby on her lap, who minded not at all.

The Professor's supper, a great bowl of porridge and a jug of cream, was late that evening by a good half-hour, and the Professor sat in the big window seat among many books and papers and stared out into the night.

His mind endeavoured to resume its normal attitude.

Minorities . . . always controlled Majorities. . . .  
Great men of history . . . had always done more harm—  
far more harm. . . . Baby . . . yes . . . a baby. . . .  
His own baby. He remembered it now. Small and very  
white . . . like alabaster. So very white. And Margot  
. . . little Margot. . . .

It was strange. For more years than he could count  
he had not thought of that brief and wonderful year  
when he had wandered in Paradise. And for some un-  
known reason to-night—to-night—it had all come back,  
clear and distinct as if it were only yesterday.

The little wife looked in at the window in her pink sun-  
bonnet with a face like a rose, holding the small black  
kitten with both hands under her round white chin. The  
kitten's eyes were green, just the same colour as the  
spring beech leaves behind.

The girlish face laughed and dimpled, the bird-like note  
called to him.

"Come out, belovéd. The world is so good. And all  
our flowers have blossomed in the night."

He went round the garden once more with her, hand  
clasped in hand, and looked at each and all. It mattered  
again desperately that the white iris had put forth its  
first wonderful bloom. She whispered to him that the  
golden tulips stained with crimson were like the cup of the  
Holy Grail.

She said to him a little song that she had found in the  
paper that morning. It all came back to him.

There's One who walks our hill-tops  
At the coming in of Spring,  
The freshets leap beside Him,  
And all about Him sing  
The Skylarks on the wing.



He brings in either pocket  
 A gift for our delight:  
 From one, He takes a handful  
 Of daisies, new and bright,  
 And snows them on the height;

Then, straightway, from the other  
 He scatters far and wide  
 The little yellow pansies  
 That 'mid the hollows hide,  
 Like children, open-eyed.

And they went in and he sat on the music-stool and she sat on his knee, and they put the words to music together.

The Professor stumbled across the room—it was now nearly dark—to the piano. His fingers wandered about the keys, striking a chord or a note here and there.

But the old, long-forgotten melody refused to be recaptured. He strove after the keynote. What had it been so full of? Brimming over . . . radiant . . . Joy. What was Joy? Radiant . . . brimming over . . . soaring singing . . . skylarks. The whole air thrilled.

. . . . .

He was still striking strange reminiscent chords, picking out broken bits of melody, when Mistress Jones brought in the lamp and his supper.

“Kathleen,” said he, and he looked at her with extreme mildness, his hands still wandering among the broken melodies. “I have decided to . . . to await developments . . . yes. In the meantime, you will take charge of the boy.”

Mistress Jones stood in the doorway, her cap and apron bristling with aggressiveness, her small grey face secretive, hard as a nail.

“I would be saying, sir, that I have had the toothache

these last three days. Sure the baby had nothing to do with me crying just now."

"That," said the Professor, "is understood. His name, Kathleen, for the present, will be William. It is a good sensible name like my own."

But the next morning, Gerry the Cowboy happened to greet the baby in the sunlight as "young Copper Top," and Copper Top he has remained up to the present time.

## CHAPTER II

"I DON'T know when I have enjoyed myself so much," exclaimed Lady Condor, rising like a billow to the hillocks and bumps that her bath chair was taking on the rough road through the forest.

"I am glad," said Mr. Fothersley a little breathlessly. He could not honestly say the same for himself. He was dripping with perspiration, a thing he detested. It dripped from the tip of his nose, for he had not always a hand free to get out his handkerchief. He was forced at moments of crisis to wipe it away with the back of his hand. Most unpleasant. The hand was not even quite clean. He frequently had to lead the pony by the bridle and to place stones behind the wheels of the chair when the pony rested in various steep places. He could not remember when he had last taken such strenuous exercise as this of guiding Lady Condor's prize Shetland pony, her bath chair and herself, over the pitfalls and difficulties of that abominable road track. The pony was in complete accord with Mr. Fothersley. The bath chair was well enough on a gravel path or smooth roadway, but here, in his own country as it were, with the scent of the great uplands sweet in his nostrils, that bath chair, jolting and jangling behind, became a purely meaningless evil. Only Lady Condor and the little pack of white West Highlanders, who were as much part of a trip in the bath chair as the pony himself, were really enjoying the adventure.

The little dogs skirmished about in the undergrowth, shrieking with ecstasy as every living thing therein fled before them, and Lady Condor did not cease to chatter.

"Why do we not do this oftener?" she asked. "We forget how wonderful our great forests are. I do not believe I have been really in them since Condor and I used to ride here in the early mornings when we were thinking of being engaged. One goes along the proper roads of course. . . . Dear Arthur, you look very overheated. We shall be out of the wood quite soon now if I remember rightly. And the Little House is on the right, across a field—— Yes, now there it is! But how pretty. Let us stop while you get cool. I hope the walk has not been too much for you. . . . And you have a dirty smudge on the very tip of your nose. . . . I do not think I have ever seen you with a dirty mark on you before, dear Arthur—come and sit on the step of my chair. . . . Rob is quite safe so long as the Hunt is not about."

Mr. Fothersley accepted the seat with gratitude and attended to the tip of his nose. Rob inspected the turf on the edge of the track. It was full of white clover, and he approved. The West Highlanders, momentarily exhausted, lay about with pink tongues protruding, and panted noisily. Lady Condor threw back her veil, unwound various scarves, and planted her pince-nez on her nose.

The Little House, surrounded by spring blossom and flowers, smiled out of its misty green setting with a friendly face.

"Quite, quite charming," she said. "It makes me feel positively honeymoonish. I would wear a sunbonnet and a big apron with pockets you know—I should have looked a duck in them once, Arthur. . . ."



"You would," answered Mr. Fothersley with conviction.

"Let us come and stay here for a week! I will propose it to James just to frighten him!" exclaimed Lady Condor, and chuckled. "But now about this baby, Arthur. Undoubtedly there is a baby in the house, the evidence on that point is overwhelming. . . . My dear father used to say I ought to have been a barrister . . . not as a compliment . . . no! But because he thought I had such a wonderful gift for confusing an issue. Invaluable when proving some one hadn't done something who had—but where were we? Oh yes, the baby. I cannot believe that James has been foolish enough to adopt a baby . . . although, of course, we know he is foolish enough for anything . . . but his foolishness isn't *that* kind of foolishness—you know what I mean. Then it is quite impossible to suspect Kate Jones of—of babies, even if she were not old enough to be its grandmother. She was the daughter of our gamekeeper at Ballinamore, not that there was any game to keep, the poachers had it all—and Kate's father was the worst poacher of any—but as he was the gamekeeper he saw to it that father had a little shooting when in residence—and the woodcock there were wonderfully plentiful." Lady Condor rubbed her nose delicately so as not to disturb the powder, and looked thoughtfully at the pony's tail. She appeared to have gone on a reminiscent journey to her childhood's home in Ireland. Then she returned from it with startling suddenness. "Of course James has always taken in all sorts of queer animals that people wanted homes for—there was an opossum once, or was it a chinchilla—something you make grey fur of. But if he once began to take in babies where would it end? I felt we must come and find out what has really happened. A baby you know . . . !"



She looked at Mr. Fothersley and Mr. Fothersley looked at her. They were in perfect accord.

"You are absolutely right, Marion," agreed Mr. Fothersley. "Poor dear James. The matter is no doubt serious."

He detached Rob from the clover and they started to curve round the field towards the wicket gate. The little dogs skirmished in front.

"He will be very cross," said Lady Condor, briskly. "And he will say terrible things. But I remember if you talked real sense to James he sometimes acted on it. Yes. I will hold the reins while you open the gate. Good Heavens, Arthur! What have the dogs got?"

Jock and Jinny, their offspring in full cry behind them, had hurriedly bundled through the gate and raced to something lying under the pear tree. They and it were now a moving and undistinguishable bundle. Whatever it was, it was unmistakably alive. The awful truth flashed upon them both.

"Arthur!" shrieked Lady Condor. "It is the baby! Quick! Get it away from them! Quick! Quick!"

Poor Mr. Fothersley got there with all the speed possible to his plump little legs, and stood hesitating above the wriggling mass. He could distinguish bits of baby here and there, but was unable, from agitation and terror, to see that it was quite intact and more than holding its own. Moreover, it was enjoying the rough and tumble. It might have been another puppy.

"Marion!" Mr. Fothersley's voice rang with distress. "I have never——"

"*Pick it up, Arthur,*" shrilled Lady Condor, manfully struggling out of the bath chair unaided. "Don't be a fool! It will get killed——"

Mr. Fothersley, driven and desperate, plunged shaking

hands into the *mêlée*, and drew forth a small form wriggling like an eel and uttering strange and joyful noises. He held it above the group of tumbling dogs and confronted Lady Condor's agitated face opposite him.

"Is the child hurt?" she exclaimed. "Examine it at once, Arthur! Do not hold it in the air like that . . . you look like some picture out of the Bible . . . not the Martyrdom of St. Paul—no—but something like that. . . . Where are my glasses? On my nose? I thought I was seeing remarkably well. No—not a scratch! Quite remarkable! And not a bit frightened. There's a darling!"

She shook her gold bag and a pair of white gloves at the baby, who grabbed at them unsuccessfully from its lofty position. Mr. Fothersley, still clutching with one hand the seat of the minute pair of drawers which constituted the baby's complete attire and nervously grasping a leg with the other, let his burden down slowly and with care until it was at a level to observe through Lady Condor's pince-nez.

"Not a scratch!" she repeated. "I don't know when I have had such a fright. Although it might have been an Act of Providence. . . . But it is a beautiful infant, Arthur. Look at its skin, fine as satin. And its hair is the exact colour of that old copper cauldron which belonged to Condor's Great-Aunt Eleanor and which I found them using for a pig bucket—exact. Arthur, you have still a smudge on your nose. I don't think I have ever——"

"I shall be glad, Marion," interrupted Mr. Fothersley with some warmth, "if you will tell me where I am to place the baby. My hold on—on its garment is very insecure——"

"The dogs have gone," said Lady Condor, thoughtfully tapping her cheek with the glasses she had just taken off. "Now I wonder if they are eating anything? At any rate the baby seems used to dogs! Let us put it back under its pear tree. And then we will look for James. Rob will be quite good outside the gate. He likes the taste of the grass here. And the hedge is of sweet briar, I think"—she sniffed delicately—"I am sure I smell it. But smells are so confusing. I remember once when Lady Ewerbank was staying with us I thought the scent she used was a cat about the place—so very awkward, of course—or was it the medicine she was taking? At any rate she was very annoyed with me about it. But where were we? Oh yes—the hedge. Perhaps you had better smell it, dear Arthur. There are some hedges that Rob eats, but not sweet briar—no. It is sweet briar—then that is all right." She took his arm in high good humour. "Arthur, I am thoroughly enjoying myself! It is such a change. Now let me see! James will be in the new room that they built on. Yes, to the right. I must surprise him. Through the window . . . it is no use looking for a bell at the front door. There never was one. It is all coming back to me. James will be buried up to his eyebrows in books and ink and things like that. . . ."

Her delightful smile beamed and flickered and her many scarves and laces floated round her, her jewels twinkled and her golden bag glittered, and she dropped her gloves into the lily of the valley bed under the window as she placed her glasses on her nose and peered in.

"There he is!" she announced gleefully. "I told you so!"

She drew Mr. Fothersley nearer to the window. The room looked as if several children with imagination had



for the space of many hours played Red Indians and Sailing Ships in it. Two things only stood out in the chaos with any distinctness; a beautiful bronze of Milo rending the oak, and a huge vase full of crimson tulips and purple iris.

The Professor sat at a big table writing, or one should rather have said splashing, swift words down on paper. His hair stuck up and stuck out. His beard looked truculent. He held it aloft with his left hand while he wrote. Presently the hand clenched tightly round it, and wrung it as though it were a sponge taken out of a bath. He frowned and stopped writing. Then he sprang up and opened drawer after drawer, rummaged among many papers in each, dashed across the room and went down on both knees before a cupboard, in which he rummaged among more papers. Then he paused.

"I distinctly remember," he said, "placing that paper where I could lay my hand on it . . . at once. . . . Ah!" He rose to his feet, crossed to the bookcase, extracted a portfolio, and produced what was evidently the missing paper. His eyebrows went up and his beard came down. "Of course!" he said, began to whistle and turned towards the writing-table.

This brought him directly in front of the window where Lady Condor smiled and nodded and clung to Mr. Fothersley's arm with the glee of a child.

The Professor's whistle stopped suddenly on C major.

"God bless my soul, Marion, what on earth are you doing there!" he exclaimed, and glared at her.

"Taking you by surprise," answered Lady Condor briskly. "How else should one take you? Not seriously—no—— And I have brought Rob and he is eating your best white clover, and Jock and Jinny and the family and they have eaten a baby. . . ."

"Marion," interrupted the Professor, "this is not a comfortable method of carrying on a conversation, nor do I believe the dogs have eaten a baby. Will you come in, or shall I come out?"

"Come out," said Lady Condor, still in high glee, and she proceeded by the outer path to the front door. "Arthur, the old dear is quite pleased to see us. I always know when he glares like that—he is glaring to stop himself smiling."

When the Professor reached the front door he certainly was almost smiling. When he really smiled it was an event, rather a beautiful one.

"So you actually came all the way through the forest in your bath chair," he said. "Well, I am glad to see you, Marion, but I suspect your motives. Errmph! They will no doubt reveal themselves later."

"They will, dear James," said Lady Condor, and tucked her arm into his with a proprietary air. "But first I want tea, and while Kate gets tea—you have Kate still . . . ?"

Lady Condor had provided Mistress Jones when the Professor had been left a widower. She had known her from her girlhood on the Ballinamore demesne, and she had been one of the maids in the big, beautiful old castle where Marion Condor's father had kept open house and lived in peace and harmony among his tenants. Kate she had been called there, and Lady Condor considered it a more suitable name in domestic service than Kathleen."

"Yes, she is still with me," answered the Professor and roared at the top of his voice, "Kathleen."

The kitchen door opened and the little grey woman stood in the hall among the shadows and curtsied to Lady Condor. New fashions did not come to the House in the Wood.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Tea! Plenty of tea, and things to eat. As soon as you can, Kathleen."

"And if the baby might be brought in, Kate," said Lady Condor. "Not to tea, James—no . . . I did not mean that. But on the ground is a dangerous place for a baby. The dogs nearly ate it. . . ."

"Errmph! How much of it is left?" interrupted the Professor.

"Don't be silly, James. You know perfectly well what I mean. They might have eaten it . . . that is to say if Arthur and I had not taken it away from them. And Kate quite understands what I mean. . . ."

"Sure, my lady," said Mistress Jones. "It's not that one the dogs would be eating."

"Also the birds would let us know if the baby were in any difficulty," added the Professor, and enjoyed Lady Condor's bewilderment.

She looked from one to the other, comically perplexed, and gave it up.

"Kate," she said with decision, "while I am here, at any rate, I shall feel happier if the child is brought into the house. There are wasps about—I saw one yesterday, though Condor declared it was a bee. . . . I see you have bees . . . and the dear funny old hives like straw bonnets. . . . They tell me bonnets are coming into fashion again—but for young girls only. James, how pretty your garden is, and so full of flowers."

She moved about the flagged pathways like some large, many-hued butterfly. In spite of her size Lady Condor retained a wonderful grace of movement. Although she now wore three chins it was still evident that her head had been put on her shoulders in the right way. Her plump hands were still beautiful, she gesticulated with them frequently and eloquently. Her feet were still small,



and she placed them on the ground as feet should be placed. She smiled and chattered and gave herself all the airs and graces of youth and beauty, and she was wholly delightful.

"But why *have* you any flowers just now, James? Our spring flowers are all over and our summer ones are not out. But you have them all mixed! Who was it said you should never mix? I think it was Marcus Aurelius in his lovely Golden Sayings. But I do not agree with him—even if he was Marcus Aurelius—if you mix properly. I remember my dear father . . . But where were we? Oh yes—your flowers! How do you get your forget-me-nots like that? Like a sky-blue mist everywhere? And the other flowers look so lovely in it. Our forget-me-nots are always in rows or rounds. Yes. Marcus Aurelius was quite wrong—you should always mix. But with judgment, as Paris—or was it Portia?—said. And your eschscholtzias are all out *with* the forget-me-nots and your Shirley poppies and anti-thingamies. Ours are only so high and not a flower!"

"Mine seed themselves in autumn, proper time. Gardeners always pulling things up."

The Professor dropped the words into the flood, momentarily checking it.

"You have a good many weeds about, James," said Mr. Fothersley, who liked all things neat and in order. His own garden was a model of these virtues. "And the moss wants clearing from the path badly."

"Don't look at them!" snapped the Professor. "Look at the flowers. Nothing wrong with them. Look at the moss too. Meant to be looked at. Notice the colour. Orange red. Beautiful. I got it from the forest and planted it there." He glared at Mr. Fothersley defiantly. "But if you don't like it don't look at it. Never look at

anything you don't like. Why should you? Lots of things you do like. Look at them."

"I cannot say I agree with you, James," said Mr. Fothersley firmly. He stared hard at some flourishing groundsel and a large sow-thistle. "These weeds, for instance, removed before they seed . . ."

"Come here! Come and look . . . quick!" called Lady Condor, who had fluttered, still talking, to the end of the path, and was looking over a wall which just reached to her chins. "Here they are, the darlings!"

The West Highland pack had discovered, in a happy moment when the proprietor was absent, the pig's evening meal in an iron trough under the wall. Jock and Jinny, with the speed which bespeaks an uneasy conscience, lapped noisily at the wash. Seated in a row on the other side of the trough their offspring gave vent to their feelings in eager whines and ejaculatory yelps.

"Aren't they a picture?" exclaimed Lady Condor in a huge whisper, calculated to reach farther than any speech. The whisper ended in a piercing shriek, for suddenly Wanky the Odd Eyed hurled himself into the picture and the air was rent with the agitating clamour of a dog argument, not a dog fight, which is a silent affair. A handsome black Berkshire sow, who had apparently accompanied Wanky, turned a dignified back on the whole affair and hurriedly guzzled up the remains of her supper while Lady Condor did not cease to scream. She called upon Jock and Jinny, upon James and Arthur. She denounced Wanky as "that beastly dog" and "that great brute." She endeavoured to hit him with her parasol over the wall at a distance of some yards, and succeeded in hitting the black sow, who squealed but did not cease to guzzle. The Professor endeavoured to make his voice heard above the tumult and added to it. Mr.

Fothersley beat a hasty retreat to a safe distance and took the precaution of arming himself with a flower stake from the border. He had a horror of fighting dogs. People ought not to keep . . .

Here Wanky shook himself free from the *mêlée* as suddenly as he had launched into it, jumped the wall, put two forefeet on the Professor's chest, licked his face, tore down the garden path past Mr. Fothersley, who lunged at him with the flower stake as with a rapier, and vanished round the corner of the house, where to judge by the sounds, the baby greeted him with enthusiasm.

"James!" exclaimed Lady Condor, "you are worse than ever! A place full of wild dogs and babies. It is really not safe to come here. My poor darlings! I thought they would all be killed. And I do hope I have not hurt the poor pig—I have broken my parasol—so fortunate it is not my new one—why did you not bring that stick quicker, Arthur? And where are my glasses? On my nose? But how fortunate! They must have got broken anywhere else. . . . And my handkerchief? Thank you, dear James. But this is not mine! This is a red one . . . and all the powder shows on it. Do look! James, I think it would refresh me to go indoors and powder my nose before tea. . . ."

The Professor's late dinner consisted of a bowl of porridge and cream, but his tea was a great affair. The table was laden with pleasant things. Home-made bread and butter, scones and cakes and many jams, lettuce, water-cress, and dainty pink white-tipped radishes. Honey served, as it should be, in the comb, golden liquid flowing from ivory cells. A noble bowl of cream, yellow and rich and of a sufficiency that enabled visitors to eat as much as they desired. And lastly, Kate's potato cakes hot from the oven, excellent and soothing. The tea it-



self was served in a Gargantuan teapot of green and white china, which might easily have been taken for a bedroom water-jug but for its presence in front of the Professor at the head of the table. The cups were of the same unusual size and none of them matched.

While his guests helped themselves the Professor drank cup after cup of tea liberally laced with cream and much sugar. He and Lady Condor talked, often both together, and Mr. Fothersley got in a few words on the occasions when they happened to drink tea at the same moment.

The dogs sat round and the Professor fed them shamelessly. This Mr. Fothersley disapproved of. It slightly marred his enjoyment of the tea. But for that it was a pleasant and successful meal.

“Most excellent!” said Lady Condor as she helped herself to her fourth potato cake, manipulating skilfully the butter which dripped from it, “but nearly as difficult as asparagus to eat gracefully. I feel like the man in the Bible—Absolam, wasn’t it—yes—when the ointment ran down his beard. And talking of beards—I played bridge the other day with a Mrs. Harty Peak. I think the name was . . . Mr. Harty Peak has made a large fortune in Petroleum—or was it in a Hair Lotion—something oily I know . . . and she had quite a long beard . . . not little short bristles like most female beards . . . but quite long and soft. And she wore a bonnet—they are coming in again, I hear, but for quite young girls—with brown watered-silk strings tied in a large flat bow, and the beard—it was grey—was laid out on the bow. And Rosa Dynchurch kept giggling at it. She revoked twice. Most awkward and so catching. No, dear James, thank you. Do not tempt me any more. A most delicious tea . . . and I am supposed to be dieted, you know—no

butter or cream, and certainly not potatoes—though why they are so fattening when they are nearly all water I cannot think. . . . And I want to hear about the baby. As there is a baby—on the ground outside—it is evidently true. But which story is true as to how it came here of course I do not know, or which of the stories about its parents. . . .”

“As a matter of fact, Marion,” interrupted the Professor, “except that I found it in the middle of the path you came along just now, I know no more than you do.”

“And when did you find it?”

“Well,” the Professor ruminated, “I suppose it was about . . . Why, it was the day I met you dropping papers all over the place outside the Assembly Rooms.”

“April 7th,” exclaimed Lady Condor. “I remember because it was Condor’s birthday. Good gracious, James, you have had it here about six weeks!”

The Professor took out his pocket-book.

“I had better put it down,” he said. “I suppose it is the only birthday the child is ever likely to get.”

“James,” Lady Condor’s voice assumed an almost parsonic cadence, both solemn and admonitory, “I hope you are not thinking of keeping this—this foundling?”

“Why not?” asked the Professor.

“I hate people who say, ‘Why not?’ James. There are a thousand reasons why not and you know them all just as well as I do. Since I have seen it I am quite convinced it is the child of one of those red-headed gipsies from Scotland who were here last autumn. It is quite possible the mother is the woman who came into my garden one day and attacked me on my own lawn. Condor had had them turned off a bit of our land. She called me ‘old Sally Slap Cabbage.’ Wasn’t it nice?”

Who was Sally Slap Cabbage? No one seems to know. A Costermongeress, I believe. Fortunately not before the gardener—no—who removed her later on using really terrible language—the woman, not the gardener, of course. . . .”

“They ought never to have let such a person into your private garden,” snorted the Professor, his beard very indignant indeed.

“But I thought you were a Socialist, James, and would agree with her that she ought to be able to ‘dob down’ I think she called it. . . .”

“Yes, yes! My heart and my head are Socialistic, quite, but my blood is the same as your own, Marion. I do not like to think you were subjected to insolence from anyone.”

“I am glad to hear you speak like that, James,” said Mr. Fothersley, who up to this moment had been entirely absorbed in the excellence of the tea. “I am glad to know that you do draw a line . . .”

“I do not,” snapped the Professor, and turned on him with alarming suddenness. “I agree with the woman. Why should you and yours have more than you know what to do with, and these people nowhere to place their foot. . . .”

“I think,” interposed Lady Condor pensively, “that the correct quotation, James, is ‘head.’”

And then for a few moments she and the Professor continued to talk at the same time.

“Well, you will get your deserts,” said the Professor. “Don’t blame me. I’ve told you till I’m tired of it. You buy my books. You read them. I make money by them, so you must. But does anyone learn the lessons of History which I make plain, least of all . . .”



"But of course I must stick up for the poor dear Government . . ." Lady Condor's voice secured the ascendancy for a moment.

"The strength of a Government depends on the souls of the people who support it . . ."

"And Condor certainly does make the most beautiful speeches, and tells us what we ought to do, just like you do, James. So wise—what he tells us to do . . . but no one could possibly do it. . . . I remember he had a plan once . . ."

The Professor snorted, laughed, and gave up the contest. The cessation of his voice pulled Lady Condor up too.

"But where were we?" she asked. "Oh yes, that dreadful woman and the baby. If it is, as I am convinced, that woman's child, then whatever it may have in its heart or its head——" She paused, and looked at the Professor very suddenly. "I suppose you have had it well washed with some disinfectant? I remember when we had a girl from the East End as scullery-maid, as a Charity you know, *Things* were dropped on her pillow. It was most painful. All the other servants gave notice, and of course no wonder. But Kate will no doubt have seen to it—and as I was saying, whatever there is in its head, there is no doubt whatever what is in the poor little thing's blood. It must turn out a thief and a liar and a ne'er-do-well generally. How can it help it?"

"On the other hand," said the Professor—"may we smoke, Marion?—on the other hand its parentage may be of the best. One does hear of such things . . ."

"Indeed yes!" interrupted Lady Condor, briskly. "Why only the other day . . . eh, Arthur?"

"Most regrettable," murmured Mr. Fothersley. "However, we promised not to tell anyone. How was the

baby dressed, James? When of—er—of better parentage I notice from accounts in the papers that they are usually very well clothed, poor little things.”

“Stark naked except for a shawl. Extremely difficult to handle. . . .”

“And you have not got any clothes for it *yet?*” exclaimed Lady Condor. “I must see what I can find.”

“Oh, we bought it some raiment. At least Kathleen did. But the little beggar won’t keep anything on. Just like a puppy with a bow round its neck. Worries ’em off somehow.”

The Professor chuckled, and Lady Condor threw up her hands with an air of finality.

“I think that quite settles it, James! And I am sure Kate does not want to have the charge of such a baby—if any—a sort of little savage—and the dogs, too. . . . Now do, dear James, let me find a nice Orphanage where the child will be well trained and taught to keep its clothes on. . . .”

The Professor rose from his chair, took a firm hold of his beard, and glared at her.

“Look here, Marion,” he snorted, “If Kathleen wants to get rid of it, it shall go. Go and talk to her. I’m tired of you. For Heaven’s sake leave us to have our smoke in peace.”

Lady Condor rose too, dropping her usual amount of raiment from her person. She looked at the Professor thoughtfully while Mr. Fothersley picked them up for her.

“Dear James, I think it is the shape of your beard that makes you so quarrelsome,” she said. “Now if I had married you I should never have allowed a beard—no—and I am sure it would have made a great difference . . .”

"Marion," interrupted the Professor firmly, "I think you are one of the most wonderful and delightful of women. You possess a power of making fools of the wisest men that I have never seen surpassed, but I thank God you never married me."

"I suppose you would not cut it off?" Lady Condor continued, quite unmoved and still thoughtful. "No?" Then she broke into one of her most adorable smiles. "Very well, then, I will go and see Kate. I shall persuade her without any difficulty. Thank you, dear Arthur. But where are my glasses?" She settled them firmly on her nose. "I shall want them to look at the baby. Though I am quite convinced it is that woman's child. . . ."

She disappeared, still talking, through the doorway into the kitchen, and the Professor looked at Mr. Fothersley.

"You are still unmarried, Arthur, I think?" he asked. "Do you ever return thanks?"

Mr. Fothersley selected a cigar with care from the box in front of him. His little pink face was very serious. Then his eye met the Professor's in comradeship.

"I do, James," he said piously. "Very often. Very often indeed. But not"—in spite of the Professor's eye he remained loyal—"not with regard to Marion."

"Marion," echoed the Professor, and lit his cigar.

It was in the nature of a toast.

The kitchen, whither Lady Condor had departed, had been the largest room in the house before the Professor had built on his library. A low, square room, with a deep-chimneyed fireplace, oak-lined walls, and heavy beams black with age and polished by much cleaning. This evening a strange mixture of firelight and the glow of the western sun chequered the shining surface of wall



and settle and chair, and gleamed brightly on copper utensils and creamy earthenware. A wisteria poked its inquisitive gold-green tendrils in at the latticed window, and on the wide sill, playing with one of them, sat a sandy kitten with a white stomach and china blue eyes.

Mistress Jones sat by the fire with the baby lying across her knees. Apparently he had succeeded in worrying off the minute drawers in which Lady Condor had first made his acquaintance. The colour of his little naked body shone predominant among many colours, the colour of life.

The little grey woman lifted the child in her arms, laying it across her shoulder, and rose from her chair.

"Will your honour's ladyship please sit down?" she said.

Lady Condor looked at the shining back of the baby, the soft down at the nape of his neck, the waving legs, the little rolls of flesh, the curling toes seeking for a hold. Then she felt she was weakening in her purpose, and looked very firmly at the kettle on the hob.

"I am very pleased to find you still with Mr. Godolphin, Kate," she commenced briskly. "And what a nice kitchen you have got . . always the nicest room in the house. . . . I saw a play once where the kitchen of a palace was used as the drawing-room. Quite lovely! One of Shakespeare's plays, I think . . . somebody's beginning with an S. Yes. And the baby has got all its clothes off now, I see. Really a most awkward trick. And what do you think about its parentage, Kate? I am quite convinced the mother is one of those Scotch gipsies who were down here last summer. They camped in the forest and annoyed Lord Condor very much because they stole everything and no one could catch them doing it. And you can hear a policeman coming such

a long way off that of course you can hide an ox even quite easily in time."

"Is it them common tramps, your ladyship?" asked Kate scornfully. "Look at him."

She turned the baby round and stood it upright with its feet on the kitchen table, and Lady Condor looked. Reluctantly, because she knew her weakness for babies. Unfortunately her glasses happened to be still upon her nose. She reminded herself that babies grew up, grew up into very objectionable people. Quite nice babies. That, Condor had agreed with her. James must be prevented at all costs from taking on this baby as a permanency. It certainly looked well-bred. Kate was right. Then who——? Lady Condor's mind began to travel round the last year's scandals, and the baby sat down, suddenly slipping from between Kate's protecting hands like an eel. It appeared to have done so that it might with more concentration observe Lady Condor. It seemed to have realised that something unusual had come across its line of vision. Something many coloured, something which glittered here and there, something which jingled.

Lady Condor looked at the baby and the baby looked at Lady Condor.

It had the most extraordinary eyes. Eyes that seemed as if light and shade continually passed over them, and as they passed the eyes changed, were liquid or soft or bright, were blue or grey or green. Curious eyes.

The kitchen seemed full of the murmurous rush of water, rushing softly, lapping along the shore. There was a sound as of the wind rising. There shone a radiance of green-gold against a glory of blue. Then the baby laughed. Lady Condor looked at the little grey woman, vaguely appealing.

"It is twenty years and more since I was down at Killyran," she said, "I don't know what made me think of it then. Do you remember the water meadows, Kate, and the little waves that ran on the big river? It is a strange child, Kate. I wish we knew where it came from—one would feel safer——"

"Your ladyship sees it is keeping it we must be."

"No, Kate—no. I cannot go so far as that——"

"Maybe it's a greater honour than you would be thinking, your ladyship. And there is none deserving it more than himself."

"Nonsense, Kate!" exclaimed Lady Condor with sudden briskness. "If it were not for that wretched Irish blood in me—not that I ever regret it, no—I would not listen to such nonsense for a moment. What would Lord Condor say? But if you and Mr. Godolphin are both determined—and I see you are—to keep the child, then give him to me at once, Kate. I have been longing to take him ever since I saw him on the lawn!"

The baby was no longer it.

"Cossy-wossy wo-o-o then!" And Lady Condor fell to talking the most pitiable form of baby nonsense, while the baby sat in the hollow of her extensive lap with his legs tucked under him like a small Burmese God. He took a deep and intelligent interest in her various belongings, but the usual destructiveness common to his age seemed wanting, nor had he apparently the ordinary infant's desire to convey everything to his mouth. The little grey woman stood with her hands folded, her still face very sweet.

"You know, Kate," Lady Condor chattered on, "when I came into the kitchen and saw you with him, I knew at once that you would never listen to common-sense or reason."



"Sure, why would I?" ejaculated Mistress Jones.

"And I am not at all sure that I wanted you to either. I'm quite sure I didn't when I saw his dear little back-view hanging over your shoulder. Yes-e-e sweet-um! I ought to have sent Lord Condor to talk to you both. But of course if Mr. Godolphin will not listen to me he will listen to no one——"

"And that's true, your ladyship!"

"And he might have taken in worse things than this little darling—tickley wickley then! You see, Kate, if he turns out—well, not quite nice, you know—and one must be prepared for the worst in case it was the Scotch gipsy—a really terrible female—if it had been Irish now—— But where were we? Oh, yes—it is always easy to find some good Reformatory sort of place. Yes, Mr. Godolphin might have taken in something far worse, Kate. Bless its little heart! Did he like the pretty bag? I read about a man the other day who kept bears, not one, several. I forget if he was real or only in a book—but Mr. Godolphin does things which people would think were impossible even in a book. Oh, there you *are*, James! Listeners always hear the truth about themselves."

The Professor snorted. He also glared, the glare that hid the smile, as he looked at the two women and the baby over Mr. Fothersley's shoulder. Mr. Fothersley was openly smiling, pinkly and with appreciation.

Always will that picture of a woman sitting by a fire-side nursing a baby, or mending a pair of socks, appeal to the sacred feelings of the male, in that inner shrine where to himself he still rules supreme and superior.

The party broke up in the utmost peace and harmony.

"Really, James, you are worse than ever, and I am as bad!" said Lady Condor gleefully, as she was packed

into the bath chair with all her belongings. Wanky and the West Highlanders whirled round her, barking joyously, the swallows clamoured under the eaves, and the baby in Kate's arms, still unclothed, waved naked limbs, and made queer and pleasant noises, and Lady Condor did not cease to talk.

"I came to reprove like Isaiah—or was it Dean Inge? I don't know what Condor will say, and I am sure all Fairbridge will talk. . . . I shall not dare tell him I nursed the baby—but who could resist him. Yes—a darling then!" She talked amiable nonsense, waving her gold bag, and the baby waved back, condescendingly. "By the way, James, he must have a name . . . what have you thought of? . . ."

At this moment Mr. Fothersley succeeded in detaching Rob from the white clover, and he started at a trot with extreme suddenness. Lady Condor clutched both sides and continued to talk.

"I will send you a list of my favourite names," she called. "Must be suitable . . . rank of life . . . not known . . . Condor . . ."

The words became no longer distinguishable. Mr. Fothersley's plump little legs were almost running. The bath chair took the corner of the hedge with dangerous speed and disappeared from view.

The Professor turned up the garden path.

"Women," he muttered and laughed. "Women . . ."

The subject defeated him. Fortunately the baby was a boy.

### CHAPTER III

THERE was no one else to care whether James Godolphin took in babies or not among his other peculiarities, or who would have dared to interfere if they had cared. He had one brother, Henry, who lived in British Columbia, and was far too careless and gentle a creature to object to anything that anyone might do so long as they did not worry him. There was only Marion Condor. And as it happened Lord Condor was made Governor-General of Australia in the summer of that particular year when Copper Top fell across the Professor's path with a beech leaf for all his heritage.

Lady Condor was so excited over the upheaval a prospective five years' absence from England caused in her life, and so intensely interested in this new departure of her husband's that she forgot even to send the list of her favourite names for the baby, though she had actually just started it, when her husband came in after a few days' absence in London, and smilingly announced the offer of the Governorship. She had begun with Randolph, and then put her pen through it as perhaps not quite suitable. Then she had carefully written down James before she remembered that it was the Professor's own name and therefore would never do. And then Condor had come in and told her the great news, just as carelessly as though he were suggesting one of their frequent trips to the Continent.



"I can't tell you how delighted I am—though it is a great undertaking for me—but I believe no one is fat in Australia—and if it were not for my figure, I am as young as any of you I really believe," said Lady Condor to her eldest son's wife, Constance Hawkhurst, who was staying at the Castle with her new baby, the little daughter who had been born on the same day that Copper Top had been found by the Professor.

"If I come back quite thin no one will know me," Lady Condor continued, and chuckled. "Though it will not do to get too thin. Think what a bag of wrinkles I should be. . But no one is just right, are they? Anyhow I am delighted the Government have recognised Condor's value at last. And it is only We who understand the Art of Governorship. These new men . . . how should they, poor things? And the Colonies know. If they cannot have a Royalty they want one of Us. We do not make those little mistakes which are so fatal—no. And your father-in-law is a very remarkable man, Connie. A statesman, not a politician. That is the trouble. He is like an Eagle among a lot of Jackdaws. But they will appreciate him in Australia. It is always so among a democratic people. Democracy has dethroned Us—but, my dear, it is very painful to see what third-rate people now become eminent. How is it done? They are not even educated. The Prime Minister himself does not understand a word of French. And what a dreadful mess everything is in. And the things they say in the House itself. But where were we—oh yes—Australia. Your father-in-law quite agrees with me, it is an occasion when one can with a clear conscience spend as much as one likes on clothes. They will expect it. It will be like getting another trousseau, only more so."

Lady Hawkhurst sighed, though with a gleam in her

eye. She was a dark, very beautiful, woman, with an exquisite speaking voice. She loved beautiful clothes for themselves as well as for her own adornment. They interested her more than anything else in the world. In Lady Condor's shoes at the moment she would have been in the seventh heaven.

"Dear Mater, how nice!" she said.

She was very devoted to her mother-in-law. It had been said that Hawkhurst had married her for her voice, and she had married him for his mother. Lady Condor was fond of her too, she was so good to look at, and though she was certainly not clever she always did the right thing. "So restful," as Lady Condor said.

"Now, dear Connie, of course you must help me," Lady Condor went on. "We had better go up to London to-morrow. We have none too much time. Don't let my passion for colours run away with me, they are too lovely this year, and by myself I could never resist them, and Condor would say my hats were too loud, though of course if I listened to him I should always be in black, which depresses me terribly—it always reminds me of family funerals and port wine and cake at eleven."

And so, still talking, Lady Condor left England for five years, to be one of the most popular Governor's wives that ever landed in Australia. No people on the face of the earth were more capable of appreciating her wonderful and adorable personality. They had a great and glorious time together, and the amazing, but probably quite true, stories about Lady Condor which flooded Australia did more to promote good feeling between that delightful race of our people and the old country than all the diplomacy of her very able husband.

In the meantime Copper Top grew up quite undisturbed by any theories whatsoever for the right develop-

ment and training of the young. Not that the Professor had no theories, he was full of them. Also he intended to put them into practice so soon as Copper Top was three years old, but the first theory was that until that age a child should be left to the women.

As it happened, however, soon after Copper Top arrived at the Little House in the Forest the Professor started his great work entitled "The Human Fiasco," which so entirely engrossed him that five years passed like no time at all. Indeed the Professor disbelieved in Time, as he did in many things which most people believe in.

Occasionally Mistress Jones shook the Professor out of his timeless sojourn in the realms of his own Mind and consulted him about the Boy. Sometimes the Professor, taking his daily fresh air and exercise about the place, muttering learned words and performing incredibly absent-minded actions while he inspected farm and garden, would come across Copper Top in what he considered mistaken situations. As, for instance, sleeping minus any clothing (the difficulty of persuading him to keep anything on remained) inextricably mixed up with a litter of small shining black pigs in the sunshine.

"Kathleen!" roared the Professor. "Oh, there you are! Look at the Boy!"

"Blessings on him, the darlin'," said she, and smiled.

"Pigs," said the Professor, "are as intelligent as many human beings and less gross feeders, but their smell—ugh—smell—yes——"

Mistress Jones picked the baby, he was then so far as they could tell about eighteen months old, out from among the pigs, and held him under the Professor's nose.

"Sweet as a nut," she said.



It was undoubtedly the truth. Then and always, Copper Top possessed some curious faculty of keeping that beautiful shining skin of his free from dirt or unpleasant smell of any kind. He had his own smell, as all bodies have, it was like the smell of the wind in the sun.

When he was old enough to walk firmly upon his feet and explore the wonderful world Copper Top gave up sleeping on the ground. There were now other places accessible which he preferred. In the springtime there was the pear tree in loveliest blossom, a wholly delectable spot; and later on the great beech trees in the grove above the Little House. He could climb any tree to its topmost branch almost as if he possessed wings, with the ease and grace of the squirrels with whom he played, even before he could run; and sing, long before he could speak plainly. And what he sang, or where the music came from, no one knew. When he did begin to run he could soon outstrip anything on two legs and most things on four. Always the interest which the birds had seemed to take in him from the first continued. They flew round him as he sped through the forest. They perched upon him when he was still. They fed from his hand and nestled against his cheek, pecking him softly. The butterflies and bees were quite as friendly. He had no fear of anything and nothing feared him. With all the elements he seemed in touch, equally happy in cold or heat, in rain or wind. It was difficult at any time, once he had mastered movement, to keep him indoors at all, but a wood fire, with the logs crackling and sending up many-hued flames, drew him like a charm. He would sit in front of it by the hour, quite motionless, watching the fire itself, or the play of light flickering everywhere. It was even possible to entice him to remain in bed if there were a fire on the hearth that he could watch.

A curious child. Wild as a hawk, yet strangely gentle. Alive with a happiness so vital and so serene that it shone almost like a light, and yet capable if his feelings were hurt of flying into a perfect tempest of rage, in which he would bite and tear, with teeth and hands and feet, at the human being who had raised the storm.

Water seemed as natural an element to him as the air. He swam and dived in the pond below the fields among the dab chicks and the moor fowl quite as a matter of course. One summer evening the Professor, engrossed as usual with "The Human Fiasco," came wandering down to the pond in his shirt sleeves and slippers. The day had been one of breathless heat. The sky was a livid blue. The sun had passed below the ridge of the farthest hill, leaving a sinister glow behind. No breeze stirred. No bird called or twittered. Only the little stream made cool and pleasant noises, danced and flashed through the heavy foliage over the dark stones, a thing of life, and fell and fell in silvered spray into the smooth surface of the pond, sending ripple after ripple laughing across to the shore on the other side.

Pleasant. Very pleasant! The Professor wiped his forehead with his red silk handkerchief. The dance and play of the water refreshed him. He liked the sound.

And then something else came glancing down from stone to stone, swift and shining. Copper Top in his frequent state of complete nudity. He slipped down the waterfall, a golden streak among the falling silver, and the Professor held his breath. He wriggled through the wet slippery rocks like an eel, and stood poised above the pond like the spirit of the stream gathered into human form.

"Take care!" called the Professor. "Take *care!*"



The boy had fallen head first into the depths of the pond.

“Good God! Drowned—swim—how deep? Full of mud.” The words jumbled altogether in the Professor’s mind as he half scrambled, half tumbled, down the bank into the water. He waded a few feet and then found he was out of his depth. It was the deepest part of the pond. Yes—there was mud. He had not swum for years. Yes—thick mud. He struck out desperately. Sudden and complete there flashed into his mind a vision of that slim, exquisite body caught in the mud, stuck in horrible black ooze—the wonderful life being slowly choked out. . . . The Professor lived through an aeon of horror and agony in that one second. Time . . . there was no such thing—he had always maintained . . . Time. . . . And then, cleaving the dark surface of the pond like a gleaming sickle, up came Copper Top’s smooth silken head. His eyes (they were brown of course) shone like dancing water, laughing straight into the Professor’s agonised blue eyes.

“Thank God! . . . Thank God! . . .” The boy’s body slipped through the clutching fingers almost as if it too were made of water. He lay back on the surface of the pond just out of reach and laughed. The laughter seemed part of the cool, pleasant noises made by the little stream, part of the ripples of the pond. It ran with them across the surface, laughing, laughing.

The Professor moved clumsily about in the water. Very cool and pleasant. The little rascal. He was very angry with him—justly angry. But was he? Of course he wasn’t! Not a bit! The whole thing was absurd. He found himself laughing too. Great shouts of laughter. He had not forgotten how to swim. He would float too. Cool . . . very cool and pleasant. A



good thing he had not his coat on. His slippers—they were in the mud. . . .

“Copper Top,” he said, “who taught you to swim?”

The boy floated nearer.

“Can’t evvyfing?” he asked.

“Bless my soul, I suppose it can!” exclaimed the Professor. “Everything except humans. I believe if you throw a young child into water——” He paused, remembering his own sensations a few moments before when he had seen Copper Top fall, as he thought, into the pond. Fear? Yes—fear paralysed—inherited. Catching.

He floated along towards the opposite shore, where landing would be easier, moving himself with an occasional stroke like some large porpoise. His beard stuck out in front of him; his silvery hair, which had grown unchecked during the evolution of “The Human Fiasco,” floated in a little circle round his head. Copper Top shouted with glee as he frolicked round him, turning somersaults in the water, and splashing in and out like some giant fish. The Professor watched, luxuriating in the cool softness, and forgot to remember there were things called rheumatism and sciatica, of which he was at times painfully conscious. Then he noticed that his clothing was becoming heavy and very cumbersome, and felt sympathetic towards Copper Top’s dislike to garments. He wished he had none on himself. Impossible of course . . . but why? . . . in many countries . . .

He drifted ashore and scrambled on to dry ground. A wholly ludicrous figure. Copper Top stood beside him with the water falling in silver drops from his smooth skin. His white teeth shone, his eyes danced. Of course! They were blue. He laughed, and again the laughter ran across the pond with the ripples.

"Run!" he cried, and caught the Professor's hand.

The Professor did his best, but his slippers were in the mud at the bottom of the pond and his socks clung to his feet like poultices. Still he ran—for the recollection of rheumatism and sciatica had returned to him. Also he liked, yes, quite definitely he liked, to feel that he could still run and swim. He had not done either for years. An absurd adventure, of course. He had been in the pond and was wet through. Absurd! But he could still swim. . . .

He arrived at the Little House very much out of breath and found Copper Top in the porch. The swallows circled round his head and chattered to him from the eaves. He was still stark naked.

"Go in at once!" called the Professor. "Go and get a good rub down!"

He felt badly in need of one himself. But—very extraordinary—still a fact—Copper Top's exquisite glowing skin was perfectly dry.

He looked at the Professor with pity.

"You're wet!" he said, as if it were the last thing the Professor ought to have been.

When he had dried himself in the ordinary way the Professor came downstairs with learned words forming themselves once more in his mind. His train of thought was, however, undoubtedly disturbed. Undoubtedly. He could still swim. A pleasant thing after a hot day . . . invigorating. . . .

He entered his study and found Mistress Jones had lighted a fire. A lovely fire of wooden logs. Seated in front of it, cross-legged on the ground, a little naked god, sat Copper Top. And to the fire he sang one of his strange songs, a song without words, only sounds of melody that the leaping flames caught and carried on.

The Professor did no work that night. He and Copper Top talked together; had supper together; and after supper Copper Top took him out to see the deer, and the deer followed the boy about like dogs.

That was undoubtedly the day when the Professor really adopted Copper Top. It was possibly also the day when Copper Top adopted him.

The next morning the Professor called Mistress Jones after breakfast. This was an unusual thing, and there was something apprehensive in her attitude as she stood in the doorway and waited.

"Come *in*, Kathleen," said the Professor. "Shut the door and sit down. I want to talk to you."

For a while, however, he scratched his nose with his pen and said nothing.

"It is about the boy," he said at length.

"What else should it be?" asked Mistress Jones.

"Have you any idea, Kathleen, how old he is, that is to say approximately . . ."

"He would be near six and a half," said Mistress Jones.

"God bless my soul! Very fortunate I asked you this morning. At the age of seven a child should begin to study. Before that age a knowledge of how to read is all that is necessary. A child's brain . . . Can the boy read, Kathleen?"

"He can not, sir."

"Tchut! Tchut! Why did you not mention his age to me before? He must learn to read at once. He appears intelligent. It will be an easy matter. Quite. I leave that to you, Kathleen. It is the woman's work. When he can read let me know. Writing will follow as a matter of course."

The Professor dismissed the whole affair as already practically accomplished.



"There is another thing . . . um . . ." he paused. "This persistent habit of taking off his clothes. It must be put a stop to. He must eventually and before long go to school . . . take his place in the world. In the present state of civilisation clothing is an unfortunate necessity. I have always felt that the lower animals have a distinct advantage over us in this respect. But as things are, the boy must be taught to go about at any rate decently clad. Why, God bless my soul, it is no time ago that I brought him home in that insecure shawl. It will be no time again before he has to go to school. . . ."

The Professor looked at Mistress Jones and Mistress Jones looked at the Professor. It was plainly impossible to imagine Copper Top at any school.

"Something must be done," said the Professor with a great air of finality.

"For the present, Kathleen, I leave it to you. He must be taught to read and to keep his clothes on."

The Professor paused and remembered the luxurious coolness of his float on the pond, the silver drops running off Copper Top's satin skin.

"At any rate in reason," he concluded, and returned to his desk and his manuscript. Became engrossed. Time! A delusion. The Present was governed by the Future as well as the Past . . . undoubtedly. . . . His book, it would prove that. . . .

He became more engrossed.

Mistress Jones had many interesting conversations during the next few weeks with Copper Top. When at home his favourite spot was the broad ledge of the kitchen window-sill in company with Sandy Puss and as many kittens as happened to be going at the moment. They played together with the wisteria sprays, both flower and leaf being admirably adapted for the purpose. The ten-

drills swayed to Copper Top's laughter, the blossoms rang to it. It was then also, when he lay along the window-sill with his lovely bare feet waving in the air and his chin in his two hands, that he and Mistress Jones had their heart-to-heart talks.

They had one after her talk with the Professor, and the upshot of this particular talk was, that Mistress Jones went into Fairbridge one afternoon and came back with some rolls of soft fine silk in various glorious colours which are the product of vegetable dyes, and a copy of James Stephens' "Irish Fairy Tales" well and truly illustrated by Rackham. Mistress Jones was in many ways a very wise woman.

She read the Fairy Tales aloud in the long evenings at opportune moments, and she made Copper Top little fairy-like garments out of the silk, all in one piece, and the boy wore them from sheer delight in their colour. They wore well, because the price of these silks was such that even the Professor noticed it on the bill, and they were almost more beautiful when stained and worn than when new. Copper Top gleamed and shone about the place like some wondrous insect. He loved the colours. The little garments felt good too. Like flower petals. He would stroke them with his fine long fingers.

"Why don't you have clo's like me?" he asked the Professor, and the Professor became more awful in the eyes of the outside world in the way of ties and socks than ever, while Mistress Jones discarded her respectable grey and drab garments and astonished those who came by appearing in gowns of pale yellow and of lavender. When they first appeared Copper Top danced in front of her with glee. He danced always if anything pleased him very much. Sometimes swiftly like a whirling leaf

in a high wind, sometimes slowly like a little drifting cloud.

"But the boy cannot go to school in scarlet silk," objected the Professor.

"It is a beginning," said Mistress Jones.

She sat in the evenings when her work was done and thought. The boy had to go to school. Had to. Of course. She would lose him. These wonderful years when he had belonged to her, like a bird in the mother nest before it flies, were nearly over. Nearly over. She thought of the joy and beauty of them. Thought of the lovely little naked body dancing in the sun and the wind, slipping in and out over the window-sill, nestling against her with the soft flutter of a bird or butterfly. It would soon be only a memory. Already she knew the prison walls were closing round the boy. There was no escape for him or for her. He must become more like other boys, she must see to it that he did, must help him build a wall of protection. The Professor . . . God bless the man . . . was buried again in his book.

He came up out of it at odd times, and talked to Copper Top learnedly, chiefly of the History of Man, when he was not too interested in what Copper Top talked about to him. He also gave orders that he and the boy should have their meals together, an admirable arrangement when both of them remembered to have them at the same time.

Mistress Jones thought on. The Professor was, among his other vagaries, a vegetarian. What would Copper Top think when he saw one of his beloved friends neatly trussed and roasted on a piece of fried bread, and found he was expected to eat it? She recalled the day when wandering far afield, he had found a baby rabbit caught round its body in a steel trap. He had carried it home



to her, bleeding to death in his little arms. The blood was running in drips down his naked body. His eyes accused the whole world. When it was all over he was terribly and violently sick. He had never been sick in all his life before.

After that Copper Top believed in "devils." He had discovered cruelty.

Mistress Jones remembered this . . . remembered other things. The boy would have to know what cruelties there were in the world. He had to take his place in it. It had not been fair to bring him up like this, conscious only of life and beauty, of the gentle kindness towards all things that radiated in and around the Little House. He had got to take his place in the World, in the World of Men as men had made it.

Copper Top's lovely laughter, as he fled among the autumn leaves like a little wind, came vibrating across the field and rippled in at the open window.

What place was there for him in the World of Men? But he had to take his place there. The Professor's words haunted her. Memories of her own came back. Her girlhood on the shore of an Irish lake, among the hills. Lapping water full of dreams, singing hills full of mystery. And then her marriage . . . the years, the terrible years, of her married life. She felt cold and sick. Copper Top. . . . She got up and moved about in a purposeless way. Was there no way of escape? What had brought a thing like Copper Top into this world at all? What were They doing? She covered her mouth swiftly with her hand as if to keep the thought from expressing itself. She looked round her beautiful friendly kitchen with fear in her eyes. Copper Top. . . . He must take his place in the world.

She made herself busy. They should have potato cakes

for supper. Presently Copper Top came in, sweet and wild out of the wind. He was in one of his mad moods; the great equinoctial gales always had a strange effect on him. He whirled through the Little House singing. Wanky leaped round him giving little excited yelps. They chased each other in at the door, and out over the window-sill, and round and round Mistress Jones, until she cried to them to have done. Then they burst in upon the Professor, who was about landing Man in his final and irretrievable disaster.

They stood one on each side of him, Wanky with his paws on the table and his great tail striking against the Professor's chair, Copper Top erect, vibrating with life. He did not touch the Professor. He rarely touched anything if he could help it, but the life that vibrated from his little glowing body was a tangible thing that could be felt.

"God bless my soul! What's that!" exclaimed the Professor, and looked up. Then he looked at Copper Top, and then he looked at Wanky, and then he ascended out of the Pit which Man had dug for himself.

"Well!" he said. "What is it?"

"'Dophin," said Copper Top, that was the nearest he had ever got to the Mr. Godolphin which the Professor had decided was a proper mode of address for the boy to use. "The Big Winds have come."

The Professor stroked the head which Wanky's persistent nuzzling called his attention to, and looked at Copper Top. Reading? Yes . . . of course . . . he had told Kathleen. . . .

"Copper Top," he said. "How are you getting on with your reading?"

"I can sing it," was Copper Top's seemingly inconsequent reply. He drew back a few paces and fluted the

whole alphabet from end to end, ran up and down it, as it were, in liquid cadenzas. Then he pirouetted all round the room on his twinkling bare feet.

"Come out, 'Dophin!" he called. "Come out! Come out! Come out!"

Wanky barked a chorus and the Professor left Man in his Pit and rose up.

Outside the Great Winds tore shouting above the Little House and across the tree tops; and gold, crimson, and brown, the leaves fell in whirling showers. As usual when he enticed the Professor out Copper Top went on in front, moving swiftly here and there, disappearing and coming back. In his little garment of crimson silk he flitted among the fallen leaves almost as one of them. He led the Professor on and away to the great uplands of the forest, where the winds sped unchecked, drenched with pungent autumn fragrance, across the gold and bronze of bracken and heather. It seemed to the Professor that the child blew with the wind.

"School? Yes . . . he must go to school. Of course ——" The Professor panted a little breasting the hill. "Every boy should go to school. He would have to earn his own living . . . every man ought to be independent . . . earn his living . . . um . . . yes. . . ." The Professor remembered a brief but awful period in his early life when, after a stormy career at Cambridge, he had sat on a stool in a business office, until a Heaven sent legacy delivered him. He remembered the various other lads who had sat with him . . . the older men, who had reached the dizzy heights of Heads of Departments. Independent! Good Lord! Poor devils . . . yes . . . there was Trelawny who wanted to be an artist . . . his pictures were dreadful . . . still . . . who loathed books and figures and offices . . . and Lowder who had a wife



. . . a delicate wife . . . and small children . . . quite a number of them . . . dreadful . . . he remembered. All earning their own living. Independent. Good Lord! What a name for it. Why they had all been dependent . . . hopelessly dependent . . . on that beastly office . . . he could see its face now, and the brass slit of the letter box, winking at him as he scurried round the corner one quarter of a minute late. Hopelessly dependent on it, and the wizened old man at the head of it, sitting like a little Almighty in the innermost sanctum of sanctums. Ugh! With what a deadly and consuming hatred he had hated it all on a fine morning. He had a vision of Copper Top caught up in the same machine. It made him feel sick. It was like a little rabbit Copper Top had brought home. Yet a man should work. Undoubtedly a man should work! His own work was good work . . . nobody had ever really listened to him . . . but good work . . . useful work. The lessons of History . . . wonderful. . . . His mind descended into the Pit Man has dug for himself. The long horrors of Man's history, ending in the culminating horror of the Great War, surged round him, screamed in the wind, made faces at him. Copper Top. What would Copper Top's work be? What could it be . . . ?

A small hand, light as a feather, pulsing with life, dropped into his own like a wandering flower. The Professor let it lie there. He knew better by now than to close his hand upon it. The boy skipped along beside him, singing as they went, one of his curious songs without words. The winds picked it up and carried it on. The Professor cheered up. He began to sing too. Some forgotten well of youth within bubbled up, bringing memories gay and glad. Old songs . . . were they old or eternally new? He recaptured something, something that

can shine and sing even in the Pit. Something . . . surely it was the same . . . yet how could it be? . . . Still it was . . . the same something that had sung and shone all those years ago when he had been what men call "in love." Great shining words came back to him, and music, like the sunlight of the high hills. He began to sing . . . he could still sing. . . . Why not? He liked it. Um—yes . . . what was that song that Margot used to sing? The lark—something about—yes—

"The lark now leaves his watery nest  
And climbing shakes his dewy wings."

He sang all the way home after Copper Top had left him and flitted away far over the heights. He sang as he stepped over the threshold of the Little House with his head in the air, so that he missed a slug who was making silver tracks across the stone step, and Mistress Jones in the kitchen, said "God bless Himself."

He swept "The Human Fiasco" to one side of his table and extracted a legal document from a drawer. He wrote a letter to his lawyer with such determination that it almost amounted to ferocity. He held his beard up firmly with his left hand as he wrote.

A codicil—yes—that was the thing. All Margot's money must go back to her own people of course. That invaluable legacy from his Uncle Richard, that must go to his brother Hervey's family. They were poor . . . miserably poor . . . eight children! The Professor snorted. Birth restrictions . . . um . . . very necessary. Too many people . . . far too many. He allowed Hervey the interest on the money already. Had to. Common humanity. The Professor consulted his bank book. Also a neat list of investments in a ledger. Surprisingly neat

to anyone who judged James Godolphin by such signs as you would judge any ordinary man. He looked at it with some pride and astonishment himself.

"Fanny the factor's daughter," he muttered, and laughed. He alluded to the lapse of a grandfather, who had married outside what was then a very close ring fence.

He added up the figures. Again he was reminded of that very brief period when he had sat on a stool at a desk. A dreadful business. Little Copper Top. He made a final calculation, unclutched his beard, leaned back in his chair, and beamed. He had done extraordinarily well. His books sold . . . undoubtedly they sold! Possibly people not so foolish as they appeared . . . still, never followed his advice . . . why read? But they did read . . . the proof was here. . . .

He looked at entries of cheques from his publisher in his bank book. "Extraordinarily well," he murmured. There was enough for Copper Top to be independent. A man should be independent. He need never sit at a desk. Dreadful business. There was quite enough to keep him comfortably. Luxuries . . . um . . . the Professor took hold of his beard again. Luxuries . . . young fellows liked . . . Copper Top. . . . He saw the swift feet on the grass, the shining head around which the birds flew. He heard the song which joined with the water, the flame, and the air. These were Copper Top's luxuries. The Professor smiled. He resumed his letter and then came to a sudden stop.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "The boy's name. He hasn't got a name . . . not a proper name. God bless my soul!"

He ought to have had the boy christened. Of course he ought. He had meant to. Unimportant details, they



always escaped him. Could an unchristened child inherit . . . or was it they could not be buried . . . ?

"I am as hazy about these matters as Marion!" exclaimed the Professor, and chuckled.

Marion! She ought to be back in the spring. He was glad. He could consult her about the boy . . . and school. He would have to go to school, of course. Copper Top and School! The combination remained so hopeless that the Professor gave it up. He would talk it over with Marion. An unreasonable woman in many ways, but with understanding. He added various questions to the letter to his lawyer, sealed it up, addressed and stamped it, and felt his mind relieved.

He returned to Man in his Pit. . . . Man . . . a regrettable accident. . . . The subject was not so engrossing as usual. . . . Boys' schools. He remembered when he had gone to his first school . . . there were experiences. . . . Copper Top. . . . He actually became conscious of a murmur of sound coming from the kitchen, and presently he left the Pit and, stealing down the passage, looked in at the kitchen door. Copper Top sat in his usual attitude before the fire, cross-legged and cross-armed. His little body looked as if carved in gold. The flames shot up, many-hued, crimson and heliotrope and green. Mistress Jones sat erect in her chair among the shadows reading aloud by the firelight. Reading James Stephens' exquisite prose. Its melody of shining words was perfectly rendered in her soft Irish voice. There are no people who speak English so well as the Irish. Copper Top listened. Every now and then he sang a few notes, as a bird flutes in its nest. The Professor noticed that when the words were more than usually full of music it was then Copper Top sang.

School. . . . The ugly surroundings in class-rooms

. . . in dormitories. No beauty but that of the boys themselves . . . the boys with their clear eyes . . . the clean light on their eager glowing faces. . . .

The boy would have to take his place in the world.

. . . .

The Professor moved restlessly on, out of the back door into the garden. The wind had dropped with the sun. A deep peace brooded. The garden was sweet with the clean, pungent smell of autumn flowers. The cactus dahlias were amazing this year . . . simply amazing. . . . There had been none so fine at the Horticultural Show. Copper Top. . . . The boy would have to take his place in the world . . . school. . . .

The Professor went back into the kitchen and sat down among the firelight and shadows and listened with Copper Top to the story of Fionn, the son of Uail.

The boy heard as one entranced. Over the clear shining of his little face the thoughts passed. They gleamed in smiles. They shivered in excitement. They shone in achievement.

"The book sings," said Copper Top. "I will learn to read."

## CHAPTER IV

THE answer from the lawyers, Messrs. Greer and Sons, came in due time; a long typewritten affair. It was legally possible to leave money to a cat or a parrot so long as you definitely specified which cat or parrot. Indeed it appeared that it had quite frequently been done, and upheld in the law courts, in spite of all the efforts of those Members of the Human Kingdom who claimed kinship with the Testator. It was not a sign of an unsound mind. It also appeared that the Professor could give Copper Top any name that seemed to him desirable, and the name would be quite valid for testamentary purposes.

“Errmph!” grunted the Professor after wading through the letter twice, “I could have said it in a dozen words a good deal plainer!”

The Head of the Firm, who was an old friend, added a postscript in his own hand. “Better have the boy christened. Usual thing. Saves complications.”

But would it? Tom Greer did not know Copper Top. The Professor’s imagination entirely failed to picture the boy, respectably clad, led by himself and Mistress Jones into Mentmore Church to be baptised. The Professor sniffed audibly. He smelt—smelt quite vividly—the damp, musty smell peculiar to churches. They would never get Copper Top inside. He would struggle, just like the new black puppy, a stray by courtesy called a



Pomeranian, had struggled that morning to get away from a very necessary bath.

The Professor grinned. He could see Copper Top fleeing away among the old grey tombstones, naked to the world, having left his garments behind in that eel-like fashion of his. He could see the little parson's horrified face. He knew that he himself would say exactly what from the parson's point of view he ought not to say. Tchut! Tchut! He ought to have had the thing done when the boy was a baby. Marion had told him to. Save complications—um—yes. But what was to be done? Marion? She would be back next spring. In the meantime the boy was learning to read. He must devote a portion of time daily to instructing him in the habits of Man. Peculiar habits—um—Copper Top would think—— Goodness knew what Copper Top would think!

He drew a sheet of foolscap towards him and wrote:

“DEAR GREER,—Boy's name is James Godolphin, hitherto known as Copper Top. Get on with codicil. Baptism must wait. Yours,  
“J. G.”

He addressed and stamped and muttered.

“Habits! Peculiar habits—— Now in the sixteenth century what do we find——?”

“The Human Fiasco” gripped him again.

For the next two months it engrossed him to the exclusion of aught else. And then something happened. Archdeacon Pinniger came to call.

It was that most wonderful thing in a forest, a perfect winter day. The sky was transparently blue. The wind had freed the trees from the crisp snow which lay two inches deep on the ground. The delicate tracery of

bough and twig showed in exquisite perfection. Here and there, in sheltered places, the beech leaf copper gleamed above the snow; here and there the emerald of moss shone, strewn with frost diamonds. Otherwise the white carpet stretched untouched, save for the marks of little feet where furred and gentle creatures had padded to and fro.

The Archdeacon enjoyed his walk. He was a believer in exercise. "Mens sana in corpore sano," he quoted to himself, as he often did when covering the ground at the rate of three and a half miles an hour. He was what Fairbridge considered "rather inclined to be High," but he did not approve of fasting, he believed in exercise. Nature's method. Though that too must not be carried too far. Moderation in all things was the golden mean. His pace relaxed as he began to climb the hill through the forest. In spite of moderation and exercise the Archdeacon was a portly man and getting on in years. He looked like some large black beetle climbing up and up over the shining snow among the sparkling trees. The life of the woods fled long before he could become cognisant of it. Nothing to his sight or hearing stirred. The Archdeacon was what is commonly called an animal lover. But he was also a man who firmly believed that all that lived and moved and breathed on the face of the globe had been placed there solely for the use and pleasure of Man. That was the purpose with which God had created all things. The Archdeacon had no doubt of it whatever. The Professor grubbing about in the Pit Man has digged for himself had the very gravest doubts.

At any rate no little grey rabbits scurried across the Archdeacon's path, no birds flew round him, no squirrel peeped down with bright eyes as he passed. The still-

ness, the glittering cold, the blaze of white, became almost oppressive as he continued to climb. He wondered how any man could elect to live thus cut off from his fellows. Most peculiar. Something in the family. Yes. This child he had taken in was no doubt an interest. But what a mad thing to do! A gipsy foundling. Mad! Something in the family. Genius was often allied . . .

The cold stillness which he had begun to find so oppressive was shivered by a child's laugh, and the bark of a dog wild with delight. The Archdeacon hurried up the few remaining yards of the forest path and came out into the open on to one of the prettiest sights—he confessed it willingly—that he had ever seen.

Across the smooth white surface of the field a small black ball of fur, mad with glee, played with the shining powdered snow like a thing joy-possessed. Its absorbed wonder and delight in this amazing thing which it had found radiated through the air. The Archdeacon burst out laughing, and the child's laugh rang out again, echoing his own. He turned and saw a slender little figure in scarlet with his arm round the neck of a sheep dog. Many thoughts jumbled together in the Archdeacon's mind all at once.

This must be the foundling. Most inadequately clad . . . in scarlet . . . very odd . . . most unsuitable . . . fustian. . . . The child's arms and legs were bare. In this weather . . . most inadequate. The child must be frozen.

The boy, however, did not appear to be suffering from cold. He was indeed all aglow. Exercise of course. A wonderful thing. He was a good-looking child, with curious eyes, extraordinarily blue, and set rather wide apart. They danced with mirth and laughter. His nose was small and straight, his mouth wide, with humorous



corners. His teeth were beautiful, white with the whiteness of milk nuts. The Archdeacon had seen a face like it somewhere. Where could it have been? Years ago. It came back to him with a blue sky, warm, not cold like to-day, a blue sky and a sound of singing . . . in Greece somewhere . . . years ago. The recollection slipped away. He could recall no more.

"And what is your name, young man?" he asked.

"James 'Dolphin," answered Copper Top. The Professor had instructed him on the matter.

"Dear me!" murmured the Archdeacon to himself. Godolphin must have adopted the boy, had even gone so far as to give him his own name. Most unwise. Always a risky thing, and this boy was probably of gipsy blood. There was no knowing what. . . . Yet the boy was extremely nice-looking, with an air of breeding even. . . .

Copper Top continued to stare at him. Not rudely, but much as a deer will stand and gaze at something unusual and unexpected.

"What are you?" he asked.

"An intelligent child, too," thought the Archdeacon. He had evidently recognised that there was something unusual about the visitor. Pleasant words by admirers flitted through his brain. "A man of outstanding presence . . . um . . . ah!" No doubt, also, the child noticed his dress.

"Well, little man," he said, "they call me an Archdeacon, but I expect you haven't learnt yet what that is. Are you not very cold with no warm clothing on?"

"I am not," said Copper Top.

He skipped round the visitor to see what he looked like from behind, and decided he was like one of the big black crows except for the funny ugly hat he wore.

"Is Mr. Godolphin at home?" asked the Archdeacon.

"He is," said Copper Top, and fled away across the snow towards the house with both dogs shrieking with joy at his heels.

They all tumbled in at the study window, bringing a powdered diamond shower with them. The Professor was half buried in his armchair before the fire, his pipe in his mouth, engrossed in a book.

"There is an Arch-dee-con wants to see you, and he's like a funny black bird," announced Copper Top, when the three had, between them, impressed the outer world upon him.

"A what! Good Lord!" The Professor groaned. The Archdeacon. Baptism! Christening! He had heard . . . but how could he? The little parson at Mentmore. An interfering little prig. Like a pink prawn. Of course . . . that was it.

The Professor groaned again. He looked at Copper Top.

"Did you tell . . . but of course you did. I am."

He rose and ran the fingers of both hands through his hair. That likeness to a poacher which the Archdeacon had once observed became apparent. A trapped poacher. He looked at the window. But already knocks by a firm hand using a stout stick were sounding on the front door.

The dogs barked. Copper Top danced up and down.

"What does he want?" he asked.

"You!" said the Professor suddenly, and laughed.

Copper Top had vanished, almost like a conjuring trick, into thin air. Wanky followed him. The small bunch of black fur alone remained, jumping and scratching and yelping below the window. The Professor picked it up and dropped it out into the snow. The knocks on the front door started again, and he heard Kathleen coming out of the kitchen.

He took up a commanding position on the hearth-rug, that position which always seems to give a man confidence, and listened with outstretched beard to the Archdeacon's resonant voice saying a few pleasant words with regard to seasonable weather.

Why couldn't people leave him alone? What business was it of Pinniger's? . . . And yet it was his business. That was the whole difficulty. It was insufferable that Copper Top should be Pinniger's business.

And then the Archdeacon was upon him. His big frame filled the low doorway. His big voice filled the room. He appeared to the Professor as the personification of the Church triumphant and militant.

He took possession of the Professor with a ringing cordiality. "Well! Well!" he said, "I am indeed pleased to have found you out at last!"

"Found out" . . . Child not christened . . . Holy Baptism. . . . The Professor jingled the words together as he cleared a chair.

"I should perhaps rather say found you disengaged," the Archdeacon went on, while noting that there were bones on the hearth (a pity not to keep dogs in their proper place) and that the Professor wore no collar. "Believe me, I disturb you with considerable reluctance. But it is an important matter brings me here to-day. An important, and, I feel you will agree with me, an interesting matter."

He spread himself out before the fire and beamed.

The Professor retreated to his writing-table chair. As a matter of fact it was impossible for any man to retain possession of the hearth-rug if the Archdeacon was on his feet. "Christening. Holy Baptism." They rung the changes through his brain like bells.

"I had a piece of great good news only this morning,"



the Archdeacon continued, and wondered why the Professor should look startled. "Nothing less than an acceptance from Sir Elwyn Clough to speak on 'The Downfall of the Darwinian Theory' at the Pump Room on January the 27th. A Wednesday. That, as you know, is early closing day, which will enable all classes to be present!"

"Quite so!" exclaimed the Professor, and stifled an inclination to burst out laughing. He was getting a perfect fool over the boy. Still the christening was of importance. He ought to have seen to it when Copper Top was an infant. "Quite so. Won't you sit down?"

"I am anxious to use this unique opportunity to the full," the Archdeacon was proceeding in his most impressive manner. "People will gladly pay to attend, and I hope to raise a substantial sum towards the debt on our Parish Hall."

"An excellent idea," agreed the Professor cordially, and wondered what he had to do with it.

"It struck me," continued the Archdeacon, "that it would be an enormous additional attraction if I could induce you to take the chair for Sir Elwyn, and"—his voice became rich with persuasion—"to say a few words yourself on this most interesting and important subject."

"But God bless my soul, why should I?" asked the Professor. "Get the Duke, he's the proper person."

"The Duke is always most kind—most kind," said the Archdeacon, "but he is no speaker like yourself, Mr. Godolphin. Nor would he be in any way—if I may use the expression—such a draw as you would . . ."

The Professor snorted. "Punch and Judy Show! Errmph. All the public are fit for . . ."

The Archdeacon held up a protesting hand.

"No! No! Believe me, we have appreciation. The enormous circulation of your books alone surely proves that."

"Punch and Judy Show!" repeated the Professor. "I have a pretty wit, sir. But do they read to learn anything? Errmph! No. They read because I amuse them, and then they raise hands of pious horror and call me blasphemous. Do they expect me to fall down and worship the Fetishes they have set up? But they like to see me knocking them down all the same. It makes them laugh. Errmph!"

"One must use discretion," said the Archdeacon tactfully. In spite of his genuine admiration for much of the Professor's work, he undoubtedly thought that it did at times verge on the blasphemous. But it was not the moment to express this opinion, though undoubtedly within his province to do so. Some other time, perhaps. One must use discretion.

The Professor snorted, and the Archdeacon continued.

"But about the Lecture, Mr. Godolphin. I am most anxious the affair should be a success, for the debt on our Hall is a disgrace to the Parish. With you in the chair there should be no doubt of it. Sir Elwyn is a most charming person. Perhaps you already know him?"

"I do," said the Professor. "A fool! But well-meaning. Wrote a book to prove that if human beings had no teeth they would be perfectly healthy."

"Ha! Ha!" The Archdeacon threw his head back and gave what the ladies of his parish called "that infectious laugh" of his. "A little eccentric in his views, perhaps—like so many eminent men—yes. But his position in the medical world is second to none, I believe."

The Professor grunted. "Probably!" he said. Then he chuckled. He got a mental impression of Clough's

and the Archdeacon's faces if he were to give some of his opinions with regard to the Darwinian Theory. He heard the restless movements of an agitated Platform of the Leading People in the Place behind him. He saw his audience. Startled, alarmed. Then he gripped them. They began to smile. Laughter broke out. Applause. They were alive—interested—actually thinking. . . . And Clough's and the Archdeacon's faces . . .

There was a mischievous strain in the Professor's composition that no schoolboy could improve on. Unwittingly the Archdeacon had appealed to it. Also he had not come to worry about christening Copper Top. The Professor felt quite grateful to him. He would help him with the debate on his Parish Hall.

"Very well," he said, "but send me a line a few days before to remind me with time and place . . . or I might forget."

The Archdeacon was frankly delighted. Everyone had told him that he would never get James Godolphin to speak, and he had once more accomplished what others thought impossible. He would call a meeting of the Lecture Committee at once and enjoy their astonishment and delight, also their admiration. He accepted an early cup of tea after his long walk, and examined the Professor's first editions with the discrimination of a connoisseur. The Professor began quite to enjoy his visit. Pinner had far more intelligence than he had given him credit for.

And then, sipping that early cup of tea, the Archdeacon looked over the edge of it and said:

"I met your little protégé outside. A nice-looking boy with pleasant manners."

The Professor's mind reverted with dislocating suddenness to the Baptism of Infants.



But as a matter of fact it never entered into the Archdeacon's head that the boy could possibly not be christened. His mind was further on.

"And how is he getting on with his Catechism?" he asked, and laughed genially. "My duty to my neighbour, eh? Always a stiff fence."

The Professor's mind groped back hurriedly into the past. "What is your name? M or N." To this day he didn't know why M or N. "My duty to my neighbour is to love him as myself." Good Lord! Well, the boy loved all his neighbours, little neighbours of tree and hedge and hole. Never did he hurt or harm anything.

"He's getting on with it remarkably well," he said firmly, and pressed the Archdeacon to take another cup of tea.

"That is splendid," said the Archdeacon. "No, no! Thanks very much. The one cup was most refreshing, and now I must be on my way home. It is a long walk."

He considered for a moment if he should ask the boy to come one day and play with his own two boys, but decided that it would be wiser to consult Mrs. Pinniger first. The lad might have picked up some queer habits living up here, and no doubt left a good deal to the servants. Also there was his origin. Yes, certainly it must be talked over first. But he would like to help Godolphin. It had been good of him to adopt the boy, though very imprudent. A Christian action. And the influence of his own boys would undoubtedly be good.

So he thought, as he wound his way down over the crisp snow. The sun was just dipping behind the far hill, a ball of red fire. A beautiful evening. Then his mind returned to the Lecture. He was very glad he had secured Godolphin. He would call a Committee Meeting for the next day. He chuckled when he thought of Mrs.

Horace Jones' face. She had been so positive that Godolphin would refuse.

In the meantime the Professor sat over the fire and read the Catechism.

## CHAPTER V

THE following Spring produced, quite extraordinarily, a long spell of really fine weather. Not an odd week here and there, but steady, consistent, fine weather. Day after day men woke up to brilliant sunshine, to cloudless skies. It began in April and went on through May. Unharmd by cold rains or winds the flowers of Spring arrayed themselves in perfection, and the countryside became a bower fit for fairy queens and spirits of the land of dreams.

People shook their heads and prophesied: "We shall pay for this later," but June came, bearing her roses and lilies, and payment was not demanded. Still the sun rose each morning in a fair sky. Through days of undimmed beauty, earth, sea and sky laughed and shone and sang, and had no complaint to make of anything. People said to each other, "Isn't this heat awful?" Some prophesied terrible disaster to the crops, and there were ominous rumours as to a world shortage in water. The papers were full of both. Also a man had shot an unknown bird in Bedfordshire. The ornithologists quarrelled with exceeding bitterness over its identity. But still, what was now becoming among the record spells of fine weather continued.

Copper Top lived through wonderful days in the great forest. He danced in the pools of sunlight among the trees. He fled, a small radiant vision, along their cool,



dim alleys and in and out between their shining trunks. He floated with fluffy black baby dab-chicks on the ponds. He sat, a little cross-legged god, among the garden flowers, with the bees and butterflies flitting round him, settling on him as though he too were a flower. For hours he rocked on some topmost branch of the great beech trees. When the massed leaves tossed like plumes in the light wind he lay among them, and sang to the wide skies his strange wild songs which had no words. He loved it all, and best of all the Winds both great and small. The Big Winds that brought him glad and cheerful messages among the tree tops, the Little Winds that wandered singing among the grasses.

The Professor decided that lessons should be dropped while the fine weather lasted. As a matter of fact it could hardly be said with truth that they had ever commenced, but when Copper Top was walking like an ordinary mortal upon the earth the Professor sometimes in the cool evenings left his work to wander with him, and on one of these occasions he had suddenly decided that they were opportunities to instruct the boy. Botany now? Or Entomology? The Professor had dabbled in both in the days of his youth. Yes—it was an excellent idea. But when a butterfly settled on Copper Top's shining head, then flitted on to his outstretched finger, and he played with it like some strange conjurer, the Professor's lore, culled with the aid of a poisoned bottle and a pinned-down body, seemed somehow strangely out of place. He remembered details of his acquaintance with butterflies, the fat blue bottle with a wide neck and a screw top, the smell of crushed laurel leaves, the old stained board on which he had pinned the frail little bodies, the pins and narrow strips of paper which he had used to fasten out their wings. He remembered various

facts with regard to antennæ and the thorax. If you could pinch the latter without crushing the whole body to pieces, death was instantaneous, and preferable to the bottle.

Yet after all what did he know about the creatures? By this time Copper Top had attracted several other butterflies and one large bumble bee to himself. No doubt they had their own interests, their own outlook upon life and things in general. One of the butterflies, a dainty Painted Lady, was sitting in the palm of the boy's hand looking at him. Yes, undoubtedly it was looking at him. Possibly they had some sort of intelligence? Certainly something remarkable in the way of intelligent creative power had been concerned in the making of them. Were they really created solely that man might admire, kill, and classify them? Were they?

The Professor decided not to impart his knowledge of entomology to the boy. He would certainly ask awkward questions. The Professor grinned to himself as a vision crossed his mind of the small frenzied whirlwind that would descend upon him if he ventured to recount the deeds of his youth with that blue bottle and the crushed laurel leaves. That reminded him—the boy must be cured of that habit of biting and kicking when his feelings were hurt. He must have a talk with him about it the next time it happened. Yes—of course it would never do to let him go to school without—— Copper Top at school. It never failed to bring the Professor up short almost like a douche of cold water in his face. A boy did not bite and kick. Hitting—that was a different thing. Permissible—quite. Boxing—why not teach him to box? The Professor remembered he had been a bit of a bruiser himself at the Cambridge Boxing and Fancy Club. He pulled up among the lavender bushes and

began to square his shoulders and throw his arms about, gingerly at first, then with more vigour. No—he had not forgotten. A bit stiff of course. The boy ought to make a fine light-weight boxer. Amazingly quick with eye, hand and foot. Yes, he would make a useful boxer. Other boys would not sneer at a fellow who could use his fists, even if he had a mania for not hurting flowers and butterflies and that sort of thing. He would teach him to box. It would help too to get rid of the habit of biting and kicking. Boxing teaches self-control. He felt his muscles, and went on squaring up and throwing his arms about. He felt he was still capable of dealing a knock-out blow on mark or point. He remembered once at Harrow . . . The Professor chuckled.

“What are you doing that for, 'Dophin?” asked Copper Top.

He had returned from a journey with the bumble bee, and was watching the Professor's exertions with wide-open eyes of astonishment.

“Seeing if I remember how to fight,” said the Professor.

“Were you a soldier once?” asked Copper Top.

“No,” said the Professor, “I do not believe in War.”

He looked at the small, slim, exquisite figure standing erect in front of him—the shining face—so alive. . . . How many of these wonderful, beautiful things had been torn to pieces, smashed out of existence, or brutally tortured and maimed and cast on the world's rubbish heap, because Man was ruled by greed and fear. He looked, and he felt that he had not made his book strong enough. (As a matter of fact his Publisher's hair nearly stood on end over various parts of it.) Not nearly strong enough! Why did not all the Churches—who professed to follow Christ—Ptcha—stand shoulder to



shoulder in one body, and denounce War instead of encouraging it? Why did not the Women stand up and refuse to bear children? Why——?

The Professor moved, muttering to himself like a retreating thunderstorm, out of the garden where it merged into the forest. Copper Top skipped beside him.

"What is War?" he asked.

War? The Professor sat down on the root of a neighbouring beech tree and began to talk. He gave a very learned and distinctly unorthodox Lecture on War. He was an able speaker when he could be persuaded to speak, which was but seldom. Copper Top liked the sound of the words he was using. He fell into his favourite attitude when he was really listening.

At first the Professor was too engrossed in his subject to watch the effect it was having on his audience. Indeed he was not using his physical eyes at all. His Mind moved entirely among the images he was conjuring up. He missed the Thoughts which passed across the boy's face as shadows across a mirror, so the sudden onslaught, as of a small whirlwind, took him completely by surprise. Copper Top gripped and shook him to and fro on his insecure seat until he pulled him off on to the ground.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop. I won't listen any more. I hate it. It's beastly—it's dirty——"

A chorus of angry, frightened birds rang from among the trees and filled the air.

The Professor sat on the ground his legs sticking out in front of him, his coat tails on either side, comically penitent and helpless. He looked at the hurt, quivering little face, and felt as if he had wiped something precious off it. He stammered, muttered, tried to explain, and ended with a humble:

"I'm sorry, old chap."

"Who are the people, 'Dophin?"

"They're everywhere. All over the world," answered the Professor desperately. What could you do with a boy like this. Most boys . . .

"*This* world?" asked Copper Top. He looked round him. At the great spaces of sunshine, the cool wells of shadow. Everywhere there was an immense and radiant peace. The lit leaves swayed and flickered, far away in the tree tops they and the wind sang together. All round was the murmurous sound of busy, happy life. It was most good and glad. Its beauty crept back into his face, he loosed his hold of the Professor, and the Professor got up. The beech nuts were unpleasant to sit upon. Most unpleasant.

"Copper Top," he said "sometimes one has to fight. But a gentleman fights with—um—fights with——"

"Do gentlemen fight in Wars?" interrupted Copper Top.

The Professor looked at Copper Top under pent eyebrows for he saw whither the question tended, but he was loyal.

"Yes," he said firmly, "gentlemen fight in Wars. God bless them!"

Copper Top turned on his heel and stretched two slim arms above his head. The birds came flying.

"I will not fight in Wars," he said. "I will not be a gentleman."

"Copper Top! Sometimes a man has got to fight. When he sees a helpless thing being hurt by someone stronger——"

"Yes," said Copper Top. He became attentive again.

"But he fights like a gentleman. That is to say he uses fair weapons, weapons recognised among civilised——"

He stopped and groaned. Civilised! Good Lord! Copper Top waited.

"You fight for the right sort of things, old chap, but you fight with the wrong weapons. A gentleman does not fight with his teeth, or his nails, or his feet, he fights with his fists. . . ."

"Though," added the Professor to himself, "Heaven knows why one of these weapons should be more honourable than the other." Therefore he was not surprised when Copper Top asked "Why?"

Then he had an inspiration.

"I do not know why," he said. "It is the law."

Copper Top nodded. There was a law in his own green world which he did not understand, but it was not wise to disobey it.

"Neither does a gentleman fly at an old fellow and shake him violently so that he falls to the ground," the Professor went on, and his eyes twinkled.

"That is right," said Copper Top, "I 'pologise."

"Good!" said the Professor. "Further, a man should be able to protect and defend the weak, the helpless, and the oppressed; he should also be able to defend himself if attacked. Errmph—with his fists. . . . The scientific method of defence with fists is called Boxing. I will teach you to Box."

"I will fink about it," replied Copper Top.

He vanished up the beech tree which he specially affected. He loved the feel of its cool silver bark. He patted it with his fine slim fingers as he climbed. The little branches leaned towards him, the lit leaves danced about him. Higher and higher he climbed among the green-gold flickering sunbeams, higher and higher till he met the soft swirl of the summer winds and saw clear above him the little white clouds floating in the immensity



of blue. Then he lay still, letting the branch he had chosen rock him at its will. His eyes looked up into the blue. They were as bits of it. He began to sing. Birds gathered round, they sang with him.

Down below in the woodland path the Professor practised his boxing. Countering, straight lefts, it all came back to him. He was a bit stiff of course, but he had not forgotten. Copper Top would go out into the world able to defend his own head. . . . At school they respected a boy . . . yes. A fellow who was light-weight champion, for instance, was safe from indignities. The Professor hit out with vigour—presently he felt his biceps. Flabby, decidedly flabby. There was a captive ball somewhere—where had he seen it—only the other day—Kathleen would know—yes.

So the Professor ruminated, and then went in to tea.

What Copper Top's thoughts were as he sang to the skies that no man can know. When he came down he found the Professor dancing round a large brown globe which was apparently doing its level best to retaliate for the blows the Professor rained upon it by hitting him in the eye.

Copper Top shouted with laughter. He found nothing at all surprising in the fact that the Professor and the Brown Ball were thus employed. The louder Copper Top laughed the more wildly the Professor hit out and the more violent became the Brown Ball's efforts to get at him.

Kathleen looked out of the kitchen door.

"God bless the man," she said.

At last, breathless and dripping with perspiration, the Professor ceased, and carefully felt his biceps as if expecting them to have hardened already. He looked at Copper Top and expressed his thoughts aloud.

"Not so bad—um—no. Knock anybody down still—if necessary, sometimes very necessary."

Copper Top slipped a butterfly hand into his and went with him towards the garden.

"If I find the Thing who set the Trap the rabbit was caught in may I knock it down?" he asked.

He gave a skip of palpable anticipation as he spoke.

"Um—ah—what?"

The Professor looked down sideways at the little figure.

"It will be three times as big as you are," he said.

"I don't care. May I?"

"It could hurt you as badly as it hurt the rabbit," said the Professor. To himself he was saying, "He must know. He must know. He's got to get to school—take his place in the world—get knocked about—a boy must get knocked about. . . ."

His hand closed involuntarily on the feather-light hand and in a second it was gone. Copper Top stood looking at him a few yards away. Of course the boy's eyes were blue.

"Not if I know how to box," he said. "May I?"

The Professor groaned—then he grunted—finally he laughed.

"God bless the boy—yes."

"Then," said Copper Top, "I will learn to box."

By the time the summer came the Professor had finished "The Human Fiasco," and sent it off to his typist. His determination to keep Copper Top more with him became easier to carry out. He and the boy had long conversations together, in which he did his best to give him some idea of what "Life" was from the average human being's point of view. It was unfortunate that the Professor's idea of the average

human being was a little out of the ordinary, was perhaps slightly prejudiced. Possibly the study of the History of Mankind does not give you a very favourable impression of the average human being. The Professor's studies had carried him even further. They had given him an unfavourable opinion of the Leaders of Men. He had come to the conclusion that Great Men, so-called, had always done far more harm than good in the world. A revolutionary idea, and one that Archdeacon Pinniger would have considered extremely unwise to instil into young people.

The Professor gave Copper Top an impressionist outline of the History of Man, from so far back as there was any Record of him up to the present time. He traced for him the rise and fall of great civilisations. He showed him how men had sown seed which had come to fruit hundreds of years after they themselves had passed away, in famines, in inquisitions, in wars, all growing more and more horrible the more man's intellect developed. He showed how generation after generation continued to sow the same seed, even while their own teeth were set on edge by the fruit of that seed, sown by their fathers. "Will they never learn?" was the despairing cry of the Professor's soul. Because, though no man gave him that credit, he really cared. He did his very best to present an unbiassed view to Copper Top. But when you really care that is a difficult thing to do. Therefore it is not to be wondered at that Copper Top arrived at the same conclusion as the Professor. Man was a regrettable accident in an otherwise admirable and well-managed Universe.

Indeed what "Man" actually represented to Copper Top, at this stage in his career, was something in the nature of a Moving Mass which made for Evil. He did



not connect the Professor with it, or the Cowboy, or the Postman, or the Keeper who came up sometimes to look after the deer. And most certainly Kathleen Beloved had nothing to do with it.

The Magic of Words always appealed to the boy, and he would listen to good poetry or prose contentedly, whether he understood the meaning of it or not. One day the Professor in a fit of absent-mindedness read him a passage from Homer, in the original. The Professor had a beautiful sonorous voice when he allowed it to be so, and Copper Top went wild with delight. The Professor decided to teach him Greek. A boy who was a decent Greek scholar could hold his own with the Masters. The Professor's mind dwelt continually on the fact that Copper Top must learn to hold his own.

He gave him lessons in Manners. When you met a woman you knew, out of doors, you took off your cap. As Copper Top so far had never worn a cap he taught him to salute. You greeted people by shaking their hand, and you said, or they did, "How do you do?" and "It is a pleasant day" or "Something equally foolish." And you did not turn round and run away about your own business when you had said it. You stayed for a bit and tried to be pleasant, and answered their questions. They always asked questions. That was conversation. Beyond this the Professor could not think of any other manners to teach him. The Music Lessons did not get much further. The Professor played the piano almost entirely by ear, and he played with considerable charm. He was a genuine music lover. After the first two lessons he and Copper Top discarded them by mutual consent. They had both lost their tempers. A thing so unprecedented that for some time at least Copper Top looked upon the piano as a personal enemy.

The long lovely days slipped by towards the end of June. The mystery and magic of Spring had merged into the wonder and fulfilment of summer. The Professor passed more and more of his time with Copper Top. Long hours in the green fragrance of the woods, in the wonder of sun and shade on russet carpets, among tall tree trunks that soared up and up and lifted their rustling whispering burden of leaves in silver outstretched arms to the kiss of the wind and the sun. Long hours lying in the beautiful spaces where the little breezes brought the scent of a thousand flowers and the murmur of myriads of small busy happy things; where the little streams came out into the full sunlight and danced and chuckled and fed great patches of meadowsweet and rose willow herb; where the honeysuckle was sweet on the warm air. He carried his books with him in his coat-tail pocket, but forgot to read and only remembered their existence when he happened to sit upon them. He had lived in the very heart of all this amazing thing for years and never before touched on even the outer fringe of the inner wonder of it. He had only remained here so long because he hated People. They annoyed him so with their foolishness. They made such a mess of things, such a criminal mess of things. He snorted and glared with rage and irritation when he thought of it all, even while he soaked in the cheerful peace of the great forest. He had to forcibly eject them from his mind. Why were they there at all? Arrogating lordship of the Universe to themselves. It would be far better without them . . . far better. His book would show. . . . But what was the good? Nobody listened! Some day People would come and destroy this bit of wonderful green world, full of happy contented creatures, and build hideous things all over it,

and they would squabble and fight and manœuvre each one to get more than the other. Ptcha. A dreadful business.

Copper Top came to him through the silvery grasses and the myrtle bushes with his arm round the neck of a little soft-eyed deer. The boy rubbed his shining head against the deer's as they came. More wonderful still the little black Pomeranian, in all good fellowship, ran with them. The animals were less shy with the Professor than they had been at first. He was always very still if Copper Top brought any of them near to him. And he loved the creatures. Taking them all round their lives were beautiful and well ordered. They enjoyed them, and did not make a horrible mess of their affairs and then howl for help to a God they had outraged. Outraged! Yes. The Professor began to get into a passion again. He believed, as so many do, in a God, not the God of the Churches, but just some Great Inner Power that made for and desired Good. Outraged!

Copper Top smiled at him, standing among the grasses and the myrtle with his arm round the little deer's neck. Other thoughts sprang into the Professor's mind. Quotations from the old Book. "The lamb shall lie down with the lion." "They shall not hurt nor harm in all my holy mountain." The Millennium. Errmph! People. . . . Good Lord! Stag-hunting and rabbit coursing. Traffic in old horses. Vivisection. Europe drowned in blood and horrors unspeakable. Naturally! What did People expect!

There were birds flying round Copper Top's head now. He left the deer and came to hunt in the Professor's pocket for cake. He fed the birds out of one hand and Little Wolf with the other. Then he fled away again



into the flickering light and shade of the forest, the deer and the dog running with him and the birds about his head. He shouted and sang as he went, a thing of the sun and the wind. He was strangely restless to-day, coming and going just to see how the Professor was getting on as it were. The Professor preferred it when he lay on the ground beside him flat on his little stomach, his beautiful feet waving, his chin in the palms of his hands, his bright eyes fixed, listening, intelligent, while the Professor held forth on many things.

But to-day Copper Top never stayed for more than five minutes, and though the Professor had a learned and interesting treatise on some new archæological discoveries in his pocket, he had no desire to read it. The glory of the woodland world engrossed him in a quite extraordinary way. Something manifested through all that beauty. Something inexpressible . . . a soul? Something above and beyond the beauty shone through . . . animated it. . . . No . . . something inside it . . . an inner thing. . . .

The Professor tried to lay hold of it by a fierce effort of will. It was there. He knew it was there. Subtle and radiant and white with glory . . . more than all these . . . inexpressible. It must be possible to attain some knowledge of it . . . it was within the limit of his consciousness. . . . His will fought to attain, but the effort failed. The lit leaves shivered with delight, a bird sang. It was inside it all. If he could reach just a fraction further he would grasp what it was.

The Professor lay back among the soft grasses suddenly tired. It was tea-time. Yes . . . he wanted his tea. He whistled for Copper Top, but the boy did not come. After tea the Professor sat in the garden among his flowers. He loved them very much. The silver sheen

on the Madonna lily petals, their straight tall stems, their golden stamened hearts, their fragrance. The texture of the rose leaves which Copper Top loved to stroke with his little fine fingers. The crimson roses among the purple lavender. A glory of colour and scent. He sat among them and still the learned treatise remained unread. That strange sense that something wonderful—inexpressible—shone through the beauty of all things did not return, but he felt that somehow he saw his flowers as he had never seen them before. Presently the sun dipped behind the big oak tree and little breezes came, filling the evening with fragrance. The Professor nodded in his chair. He muttered indistinguishable words. He fell fast asleep.

He only woke up when Mistress Jones brought out his porridge and cream and some strawberries.

"The boy?" he asked. "Has he been in?"

"He has not," answered Mistress Jones. Then she added rather suddenly, "I am thinking he will not be coming in to-night."

"Why not, Kathleen?"

Mistress Jones looked round over the flowers, down into the great depths of the forest.

"It is Midsummer Night's Eve," she said. Her voice was hardly above a whisper. She had that uncanny look upon her face which always annoyed the Professor. He knew too that she had ideas concerning Copper Top which she imparted to no man not even to himself. That also annoyed him.

"Well!" he grunted. "What of it?"

Mistress Jones observed him. His face showed more anxious interest than he knew. She moved a little nearer and dropped her soft voice lower yet.

"There will be those that are kin to him abroad to-

night," she whispered. "It is the hour. The woods know it and the creatures, and would he not be knowing it too, God bless him?"

She slipped away in her noiseless fashion, and left the Professor with his porridge spoon poised in mid-air.

So that was it! A Fairy Changeling or some such nonsense of that sort. Of course. Ireland was full of these legends . . . his old nurse . . . yes, of course, full of them. Undines and Air Sylphs who slipped through into human bodies as their rightful owners slipped out. . . . Midsummer Night's Eve. Shakespeare had used the idea. He remembered he had been given the Play to read as a holiday task. Terrible nonsense really. Disguised under a Magic of Words. And Kathleen believed in such things! He would have thought her superior. . . . But these old legends had a firm hold. Very firm. Like all superstitions . . . a much firmer hold than people realised, even on the highly intellectual who considered themselves free. . . . Free? Errmph!

He finished his strawberries and then his porridge. It was fortunate the boy was so extraordinarily independent of food. He looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock, and still quite light in the open. The after-glow of the sun lingered. He would stroll up into the great Beech Grove above the Little House and see if there were any sign of the boy. He stepped into its cool depths and found himself almost in darkness. Wanky followed, noiselessly padding at his heel. Except the rustle of his own footsteps among the leaves there seemed no sound, but when he paused and looked up into the mysterious immensity above he could hear a faint far-off murmur as of a great sea on an endless shore.

Strange things trees. Something akin to awe fell on him as he looked up and listened. Very strange. There



were places . . . uncivilised of course . . . where they worshipped supposed spirits in trees. Quite understandable in a spot like this. Mysterious . . . majestic . . . yes, awe-inspiring. He had never been up here after night-fall before. It was wonderful . . . that was the right word . . . wonderful. He began to discern things better. The exquisite straight trunks, the delicate tracery of branches above. No cathedral he had ever seen reached this place in beauty. Here was the real "dim religious light." Here one longed to be able to pray.

Was he afraid? It was not possible! But was he? At least he was overwhelmed; with a sudden intensity of desire for that sunlit space in the gold-green glade, for That which had manifested through Its Beauty, in Its Beauty. The desire was so great that it seemed like fear. Was he afraid . . . ?

And then Copper Top came flying down the Grove. His blue silk shirt was caught back and the hair blown up from his forehead by the speed with which he came, a little flying figure of light through the dim shadows. With him, sweeping on outstretched wings, came a white owl, and by his side ran Little Wolf with the long loping run of his ancestors.

"You have come!" he called. He circled round the Professor and halted at his side. "You have come!" he said again.

The Professor felt the life from the boy's little body vibrating, filling his own with some strange electric energy. He felt young again. Ridiculously young! Home? Bed? The very idea was absurd.

"Yes, here I am," he chuckled. "And now where are we going?"

Copper Top moved backwards in front of him, lightly,

on the tips of his toes. He could walk backwards with unusual ease for a human being.

"Up! Up! Up!" he sang. "Up to the winds and the clouds and the sky, and the stars and the big, big moon."

The Professor followed. They passed out of the Beech Grove into less dense foliage. He could see the sky peeping through the branches, here and there a star twinkled. Twice he saw the dim outline of deer close at hand. Their soft eyes looked at him out of the shadows, unstartled, without fear, with only a gentle curiosity. Copper Top flitted on in front, and with him swept the white owl. Sometimes he went so quickly that the Professor lost sight of him altogether. They were off any beaten track now, and when they dipped into one of the valleys it was very dark again. But the Professor held on valiantly, and the first time that he paused in serious doubt as to his way, Copper Top's butterfly hand fell into his, and the boy was back again.

"I don't know where you are making for, old chap," said the Professor blinking, "but are you sure this is the way?"

"Everywhere is the way," said the boy, and laughed, and his laughter ran in ripples across the darkness. His eyes shone in it. His whole body quivered with vitality. Nevertheless, he stayed with the Professor through the valley. It was close and hot and uncannily still. The noise of the Professor's footsteps seemed to him abnormal. The boy and the dogs moved without sound. He looked up, but there was no glimpse of sky or glimmer of star, only a curious deep twilight in which leaves and branches assumed strange shapes and shadows.

Then they began to climb again, and gradually once more it grew lighter. There were glimpses of sky which seemed aglow from some far-off fire, and soon came little

open spaces among the trees, and then a straight outlook on the right; to the west, the Professor thought. He recognised the outline of the far hills, still softly radiant in the after-glow from the sun. The sky was soft with it too; it looked of immense depth. The moon was not up. The after-glow hid the stars.

The Professor climbed on. Copper Top was flitting in front once more, disappearing, returning, and where he moved the owl's broad white wings cleft the sky above his head. And then the forest fell altogether behind, and they were out on the Great Uplands. All around them the young bracken grew thickly. Its curled green fingers were just beginning to open. Among it stood great, grey stones. The Professor stood also, with his hat in his hand, and bent his grey head among them. Far away below, the massed trees of the forest looked immensely dark. Beyond, the hills were still strangely aglow. He watched the moon come up and turn them to silver. Beauty smote him like the stroke of a sword. A stroke that clave through all things to that innermost thing which was Himself. He had climbed out of more than physical darkness. He was in a new place.

Copper Top looked back at him. His face shone like a star. "Come," he said once more, and the Professor followed again, over the bracken, among the grey stones, leaving his hat where it had fallen from his hand. Far away on the Mentmore Road he heard the bwhirr bwhirr of a motor-bicycle as it toiled up the long hill out of Fairbridge. The moon rose higher and higher in the deep sky. The after-glow faded away. The stars filled heaven. The world was moon-white. He stepped out of the bracken into a patch of budding heather, fragrant beneath his feet, and then he stopped again. In front of him lay a whole field of blue-bells, silver-blue in the



moonlight, exquisite, aerial, thousands upon thousands, shivering with joy as the little breezes wandered among them.

Some words, when read and why remembered the Professor did not know, flashed through his mind.

“There is no Great or Small  
But God Who maketh all.”

Copper Top was among the blue-bells on his knees. He held his hands out, palms upward. His little face was like a living moonbeam.

The Professor knelt down too. The movement was unconscious, automatic. Something was going to happen. He waited. A little wind came softly, softly murmuring up from the east.

The Professor started. Was it . . . Were they? It was not possible. He bent his head lower and laid his ear above the flowers. Yes. . . . It was possible. They were. They were chiming—chiming dainty music . . . like little bells . . . bell notes. Very clear and true . . . bells . . . chiming.

The Professor lifted his head; the sense that something was going to happen became acute, and suddenly he covered his face with his hands. The movement was as automatic as when he had fallen on his knees.

What had passed him . . . moving over the singing flowers . . . ? He was conscious of Something Vast . . . a Presence . . . a Radiance of Blue. . . . There swept over him a glow of life and well-being, of security. He was enveloped in Light. He was in touch for one Eternal Moment with That which manifested through all Beauty. He uncovered his face and lifted it up, holding out his hands even as Copper Top had done, but the

Presence had passed, and with It went the boy. The owl too . . . and there were other birds swift and circling. There were deer running, many of them, and little eager rabbits. All the Forest World seemed out. The dogs were following too. It seemed all Nature followed and only Man was left behind.

The Professor knelt on among the dew-drenched grasses, for the time being beyond Thought, until the moving things vanished. The moon was now high in the heavens. Around him it was light as day. The blue-bells shivered still, with delight. Some little golden star flowers looked up at him, each content in its own perfect place. They held a meaning in their eyes, and through them something looked at him.

His physical brain began to work again. It moved stiffly at first. Only long-forgotten bits of old prayers came back to him. Old words of praise that he and Margot had sung together in Paradise. He knew where she was now. Inside . . . with all that . . . surely he had been Inside for one Eternal Moment too. . . .

Again the little winds came murmuring up from the east, fragrant and fresh and sweet. The blue-bells swayed beneath them, dancing among the moonbeams, but they rang no melody. Could he have imagined it? He tried to recapture the notes in vain. Could it all have been imagination? Flowers did not . . . Of course not! But he had heard the bwhirr of a motor-bicycle on the Mentmore Road just a few moments before. He had not imagined that. Why should not flowers sing? Again old remembered words came back to him. "He that hath ears to hear." Had he not guessed sometimes the possibility of subtle sense lying inside the physical senses? With those senses what might one not hear . . . what might one not see . . . ?

An Inner Light. Who knew what animated and lit the whole world of matter? Who knew? Not Man. Least of all Man.

The Professor snorted. His mind began to run in its usual groove once more. Man! Far off on the Mentmore Road another motor-bicycle began to climb the long hill. He rose stiffly from his knees. His feet and ankles were wet with heavy dew . . . rheumatism . . . sciatica. . . . He ought to have put on his boots and gaiters. But he had not known. He looked round him to take his bearings. The great stretches of moorland lay very still, bare of all moving life so far as his eye could reach. The grey stones of the old quarry shone silver-white in the moonlight; he would strike the homeward track there. A good four miles to the Little House. The motor-bicycle had reached the top of the hill; he could hear the softer wh-i-r-r as it reached the level. He would get off home as quickly as possible. He was cold. The boy . . . the boy would not be back for hours. Something that was not physical cold penetrated him. He envied the boy . . . he would follow now if he had any idea where . . . or which way. But the great forest lay silent and immovable. It would yield no more secrets to him that night.

He stumbled across the heather and bracken in the direction of the quarry. Imagination! After all what was Imagination? And he had not imagined all those animals following . . . with the boy . . . the birds flying. . . . He was not a neurotic female. People would say he was mad . . . of course. People! People would say anything. He envied the boy. What world of wonder was it that he cognised . . . moved in?

The Professor felt old and tired, left outside, as he stumbled along the homeward track alone. He passed



into the wooded land. It was dark and cold, very cold; his slippers were wet through; he was miserable. Then he tripped over an uneven piece of ground and nearly fell. It was the climax. He felt like crying. . . .

At that moment a soft muzzle poked itself into his hand. Wanky had come back to him.

He got home somehow, groping and stumbling, and put himself to bed; but he could not get warm. He only slept in snatches, with intervals in which his mind wandered round and round the events of his midnight adventure in circles, and finally woke up shivering with one of his violent colds in his head.

"Bless the man!" exclaimed Mistress Jones, hearing violent sneezes from above. The Professor had a magnificent sneeze. It seemed to shake the whole house. She hurried up to him with hot bottles and hot coffee, and persuaded him to stay in bed for his breakfast.

"And what would you be expecting staying out in the forest till all hours and the dew so thick on the ground?" she asked him severely. "And I not able to sleep in my bed for fear of what might be overtaking you."

She handed the Professor a fresh supply of handkerchiefs, and he blew his nose violently, but answered meekly enough.

"You are right, Kathleen. I am too old for these pranks, I fear. Is the boy in?"

"He came in just after sunrise, and Little Wolf with him, and the two of them are asleep together in the hammock under the Big Oak," said Mistress Jones. She had watched all her family safely in, praying many prayers the while to the Saints and the Holy Virgin for their protection. But of this she said nothing, for she was a silent woman, nor did "They" like to be spoken of.

The Professor slept through most of the morning, tucked up cosily with his hot bottles. So did Copper Top under the Big Oak. Wanky and Little Wolf kept guard over their respective masters. It was a beautiful day and a pity to waste so much of it, but the patience of dogs with human beings is infinite.

It was tea-time before the Professor woke up thoroughly, and got into his dressing-gown and slippers. He looked out of the window and discovered Copper Top still under the Big Oak. He too was awake and sitting on the ground, cross-legged as his fashion was, with a tumbler of milk in one hand and a slice of cake in the other. Birds were all around him, glancing here and there, chattering and chirping. One was on his shoulder, another perched on his forefinger and pecked at the cake. Little Wolf was stretched flat on his stomach, his legs stuck straight out behind and before. Every now and then he threw up his little pointed muzzle and barked, joining amiably in the conversation. Copper Top fed the dog and himself alternately. He looked up at once, when the Professor's night-cap bobbed out of the window. No living thing appeared within a tangible radius of Copper Top without his knowledge.

"Are you better, 'Dophin?" he called up.

"Yes," said the Professor, and was forthwith seized with so violent a fit of sneezing that it frightened every bird away, chattering with anger and disgust, and caused Little Wolf to bark furiously beneath the window.

The Professor retired again, and decided to put his feet in mustard and water. It would draw the cold down from his head. And he would have a dash of brandy in his tea.

While he sat with his feet in the mustard and water,

and a rug round his knees, and drank his tea, he began to think. His brain cleared, and he recalled all the strange events of the previous night. Most certainly they had occurred during his waking consciousness. He went over every step of the way, from the Beech Grove to the Great Uplands. He had watched the moon soaring in that immense depth of sky, and he had heard the motor-bicycle panting up the Mentmore Hill. Nothing non-material about that. And he had only just stopped walking through the young bracken and across that little strip of heather and myrtle when the strange happenings had occurred. He had been walking all the time . . . except for . . . How long had he been on his knees among the wet grasses? Well! you don't suddenly go down on your knees and go to sleep! Of course you don't! No, the thing had happened. However strange . . . abnormal even . . . it had happened. He recaptured the vision of Copper Top kneeling among the blue-bells with outstretched hands, palms upwards. What gift had he received? His face had looked as if made out of moon-beams. Copper Top? Where did he come from? Out of what strange world of living things? He strove to recapture that sense of some Great Presence which had filled him with an eternal moment of ecstasy. It was dim already. Yet he had known it. Blue . . . yes, of course it was blue. . . . The blue-bells. They had chimed . . . chimed exquisite music. If he could remember that. Did earth and water and air hold secrets beyond our ken? An inner Life to which we were deaf and blind? And yet which we might know. . . . Was the utterance of Life after all not a Cry but a Song? The Music . . . if he could only recall it. . . .

He nodded in his chair. The brandy in the tea made



him sleepy. The mustard and water was soothing. He was nearly asleep.

And then suddenly he sprang up with a cry of triumph. He scrubbed his feet hurriedly on the bath towel beside the basin and poked them into his slippers. He shoved the basin to one side and the table to the other, gathered the rug in a bunch round his loins, and stumbled across the room down the stairs. His night-cap bobbed and his slippers flapped. He sneezed violently as he went. The doors and windows were all open, but he cared nothing. The blue-bell music had come to him suddenly as he dozed. He must get to the piano at once before it escaped him.

He trailed across the library, one end of the rug behind him, sneezing as he went. Wanky barked and leaped beside him; evidently great events were toward. He sat, his tongue hanging out with excitement, and watched while the Professor's fingers stumbled about among the piano notes as he hummed through his nose little attempts at the tune he strove to capture. Presently it began to come. Chimes . . . clear and sweet . . . dear dainty chimes. . . .

His whole body was drawn together with the effort of concentration. Then it relaxed. His eyebrows went up, his beard came down, his face shone. He had it! He had it! Yes . . . it went like that . . . do . . . re . . . mi . . . fa . . . Ah-tich-ooo! He had it!

He moved to the writing-table, leaving the rug twined round the music-stool and one slipper on the floor. He jotted down notes on a sheet of paper. He came back to the piano and played it over again, securing his lost slipper by the accident of placing his foot on it. He jotted down more notes. He sang again. Do . . . re . . . mi . . . Ah-tich-ooo! Fa. Sol. Ah-tich-ooo!

Then he frowned and muttered. It was not quite right. There was something missing. Why had he never really studied music? Every one of those flower bells had chimed different notes in harmony. And what harmony! Ah . . . a good idea! He would send the rough score he had made out to old Pendlebury. Pen was a Doctor of Music. He sat down again at the writing-table, seized his stylo pen, and paused. Wanky retired in disgust to the hearth-rug. It was a sign that he had almost given up hope that anything of an exciting nature was about to happen; but he kept one half-open eye on his master in case of any fresh developments. The Professor continued to ruminate, pen in hand.

Should he tell Pendlebury how he had come by the motif? He would undoubtedly think him mad. But old Pen was mad himself! He had written a book to prove that Stonehenge was built by Adam to celebrate the Fall. Quite mad! All the best people were mad.

The Professor chuckled and muttered, "Quite mad!" Still he would not tell Pendlebury. It was immaterial where he had got the music from. He wished old Pen would come and stay for a few days. He could consult him about the boy's education. He splashed off a letter, enclosed his rough score, sealed it up, and addressed it to Dr. Charles Pendlebury, Magdalen College, Cambridge. He would be on his vacation now, but the letter would be forwarded. Or possibly he had not gone away at all. He was a homing bird, and that garden of his . . . running down to the Backs . . . very pleasant in June.

He called for Kathleen.

"Bless the man," she cried. "And him with nothing but his dressing-gown between him and the window and

the draught. And your hat out on the world, for I can find it nowhere!"

"I shall have my supper down here, Kathleen," said the Professor firmly. "Send Gerry down to the pillar box in time for post, with that letter. And you may light the fire."

He dozed over it and thought of the boy. Yes . . . he would like him to go to Cambridge when he was old enough. He remembered his own time there. They had been good days. Very good. Half asleep, he was back in them again in thought. He wandered across Trinity court with his gown over his shoulder, he looked into the Buttery . . . they never had kept a decent brand of cigarettes there . . . never. . . . He strolled into the Common Room and found friends long dead, friends almost forgotten, sprawling on the tables reading the newspapers. Names and faces came drifting back to him. And with them that wonderful atmosphere of youth.

Yes, they were good days. Copper Top would like Cambridge . . . impossible to do otherwise. A Greek Scholarship . . . why not? School first . . . um . . . Copper Top at school . . . christened . . . not christened. He must talk to Pendlebury . . . Cambridge . . . yes. . . .

His head nodded lower and lower. He was sound asleep. Presently his nightcap dropped off. Wanky sidled nearer and laid his muzzle across his master's slippered foot and slept too. Presently the western sunlight filled the room and lit the silver halo round the Professor's head. The Professor dreamt, dreamt that he and Copper Top were christening the Archdeacon in the big fountain of Trinity Court, and Marion Condor came, and was terribly concerned because he had nothing



on. She gave him a very long blue scarf, and he wound it round and round the place where his waist should have been, and said, "One must use discretion. It is blue in colour and convertible to any shape, and was habitually used by the late Queen Victoria who was recommended it by Vesta Tilley."

Here the Archdeacon began to sneeze violently, and the Professor woke up to find he was doing the sneezing himself. He remembered the end of his dream, and laughed and decided he had better go to bed.

By the following evening the Professor was nearly himself again, and he and Copper Top had their supper together under the oak tree, with the usual company of birds and beasts. In Copper Top's environment even cats and birds established a truce. It seemed to the Professor a good moment to question him on those strange happenings of two nights ago. They were already becoming more vague and improbable in the Professor's mind, but there was the music, that indescribably dainty chiming melody with the wonderful harmonies, and there was the sound of the motor-bicycle climbing Mentmore hill. He had not imagined one without the other. He would ask Copper Top. It was absurd not to. And yet it was, equally absurdly, very difficult to do so. He decided not to give away to what seemed like a ridiculous shyness.

"Copper Top!" he began, and paused. Then he made a plunge. "The blue-bells were ringing something . . . the other night you know—ringing music of sorts. . . ."

"Yes," said Copper Top, with no undue interest. He was busy feeding a small blue tit out of a spoon.

"Well," the Professor stammered. "I didn't know—I had no idea—"

Copper Top turned his wide eyes on him and laughed a little.

"There's such a lot of things you don't know!" He stated what was to him a matter of fact and meant no disrespect.

"I suppose there may be," said the Professor humbly. "But they did sing . . . ?"

"Evvything can sing." Copper Top spread his arms out wide as if to embrace the whole universe. "It's all part of the Big Song. I can't hear it all, but I fink I hear lots more than you do."

"Then you did hear the blue-bells too?"

"Of course I did. They were singing like—like anything the other night."

"Can you sing their music, old chap?"

Copper Top shook his head. "No, coursé I can't, 'Dophin," he said patiently. "Evvy bell has a different sound and they can ring all the sounds at once. I can only do one at a time."

He ran up the scale in his lovely clear voice, and laughed again and began to play at rough and tumble with the dogs and Sandy Puss while the birds finished his porridge.

The Professor thought things over. A blue-bell orchestra! But it was too absurd! And yet why not? What did we know or understand of sound after all? Our little gamut of notes, was it likely they comprised the whole realm of sound? Of course they didn't—we knew that at any rate. Then why had *he* heard the other night? Abnormal conditions—yes—undoubtedly they were. That Presence . . .

"Copper Top," he called, "stop a minute! I want to ask you something else . . ."

Then he stopped. It was not so easy. The boy waited.

"Old chap," said the Professor slowly, "there was something up there the other night. A Presence—a Being—something Vast. . . ."

He stopped again, for Copper Top's face had assumed an expression of complete detachment. The Professor had a curious feeling as if a door had been violently shut. He cursed himself for a fool. A silly fool! He had known perfectly well that Copper Top lived partly in some strange world of his own, and that he was curiously reticent about it. And now, just when the boy had as it were admitted him into it, he must needs go and spoil it all by asking questions. But had Copper Top admitted him? His thoughts flashed back to the beginning of the adventure. He had wandered up into the Beech Grove looking for the boy. The boy had found him there. He had called to him. "You have come!" He had taken it as a matter of course. The Professor recaptured the sense of exhilaration with which he had responded. They had gone together. All things in the forest had gone. Was it possible that Copper Top had taken it for granted that the Professor was out on the same business as himself? Of course it was! It was not only possible, it was what had really happened. It was just a bit of pure luck that he had touched the hem of that wondrous garment, had sensed the joyous fragrance of happier worlds than ours. And he must go and spoil everything asking questions—frightening the boy. . . .

Copper Top was up in the oak tree now, lying along one of the branches. Sandy Puss lay in much the same attitude on a higher branch. Her tail waved, her china-blue eyes glittered, she curled and uncurled her velvet paws, tempting him to spring at her. Presently he sprang. There was the flash of two moving bodies in



the tree, a scuttle and a rustle, and Copper Top and Sandy Puss were on the same branch, the cat in the boy's arms, purring and patting his face with her soft curled paws.

"God bless the boy!" exclaimed the Professor, and meant it. At any rate he had not minded the question about the blue-bell music. The Professor wondered what he would think when he heard it on the piano, and chuckled. It should be a surprise. He would not tell Copper Top a word about it. It should be a surprise.

He lit his after-supper pipe and smoked on peacefully, thinking and planning for the boy. His usual train of Thought was broken up. He thought no more of Man and the Pit he had digged for himself, except in so far as that same Pit affected Copper Top. For take his chance of getting into it the boy must. Look which way the Professor would there seemed no royal road of escape. The boy had got to face the senseless cruelty, the brutal competition, the bitter jealousy, the fear and the greed and the vanity.

But for the moment he was playing happily with Sandy Puss in the oak tree, and the world of Nature was at its midsummer best. The Professor smoked on peacefully, with the blue-bell music drifting through his brain.

## CHAPTER VI

DOCTOR CHARLES PENDLEBURY accepted the Professor's invitation. As it happened he was staying at Eastbourne and would be delighted to spend a night with his old friend on the way home. Also he added he was interested in the music.

The Professor had met him at various intervals since their Cambridge days, so there was no need to speculate on whether he was much changed from the solemn, rather smug-looking youth with whiskers, in the group over the mantelpiece. The Professor knew that he had now an iron grey moustache and a bald head, and that he had the cheerful, rubicund appearance of a man who loved the good things of this world. He more than suspected that Pendlebury was pernickety over his food, and decided with a sigh that some attempt at late dinner was necessary. He had told him not to bring dress clothes, and that during his stay he would have to be a vegetarian. Fortunately Mistress Jones' cooking was above suspicion. The Professor ordered soup, an eight egg omelette, a purée of green peas, a macaroni and tomato soufflé, junket and strawberries, and an extra large bowl of Devonshire cream, cheese and butter, and a salad with every possible vegetable in it. He undraped a bottle of port from immemorial cobwebs. He emptied a second armchair of its usual contents, books and papers, placed a tin of the best tobacco beside it, refilled the one big vase with roses, and felt that the heart of man should desire no more.

Copper Top was intensely interested. Visitors, even those who only stayed for an hour or two, were rare, but one who was to stay for a whole night was unheard of. After tea, when the Professor had gone to meet this wonderful arrival at the station, he came and lay along the kitchen window-sill to watch Mistress Jones prepare the evening meal, and ask questions.

"I 'spose he's very beautiful, Kathleen?" he asked.

"What! the Doctor!" answered Mistress Jones. "Why would you be thinking that, belovéd? He's just a man."

"Aren't men ever beautiful?"

"Here and there maybe. But it's seldom enough you meet such, and that's the truth."

"Then I 'spose he's very wise?"

"He has the book-learning," said Mistress Jones, who gave to no man more than his due. "And I've heard he's grand at music."

Copper Top slid to his feet and skipped with joy.

"Oh, Kathleen Belovéd, why didn't you tell me at once! I knew he must be somefin wonderful. Will he sing to us, do you think?"

"I'd be thinking he's a bit too old for singing. But perhaps he'll be fine on the piano."

Copper Top's face shone. "P'raps he'll play us the things we've never heard before, Kathleen! All the things out of the music books that are too dif'cult for 'Dophin to read. The heaps and heaps of little black dots that all mean sounds. Why can't I sing more than one sound at once, Kathleen?"

"The good God knows," said Mistress Jones. It was an excellent answer to many of Copper Top's questions. Also he knew it was final. He slipped out again over the window-sill, ran down the garden path and



across the field. He moved so lightly that his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground. At the bottom of the field stood a tall fir tree. From its topmost branches you could see far over the forest, and watch at various points the upward pathway. Copper Top went up to the top as easily as a little squirrel. He sat himself in one of the forks with his feet swinging, his arms, so far as they would go, round the trunk, and his cheek against the rough bark. The tree top swayed ever so gently, he could feel the vibrations that radiated from its centre. It sang too, and presently Copper Top began to sing with it, a little murmur of song. Later on the wood pigeons who made their home in the tree, came circling in and sat with him cooing softly.

It was quite a long time before he saw two little dark figures appear, first in one and then in another place, where the pathway was visible. Up they came, up and up like two large beetles crawling, he thought. And then he could hear their voices, murmuring and booming, now loud now hushed, according to the lie of the ground. They were talking hard. And what a funny noise it was. Copper Top laughed. The visitor had got the boomiest voice he had ever heard. He did wonder what he would be like to look at. When they came out at last into the open the two men stopped, while Dr. Pendlebury boomed ejaculatory appreciations of the Little House and made acquaintance with King Edward. He was much shorter than the Professor, a little man with heavy shoulders, and he looked as if he was really enjoying himself. Copper Top liked the look of him. He whistled the two notes which were his call to the Professor and began to come down.

The Professor grasped his friend's arm with one hand and pointed Copper Top out to him with the other.

He was really rather excited over their meeting. Was the boy . . . ? Yes, he had even got his sandals on.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Surely that is very dangerous. . . . By Jove! The little rascal! He can climb!"

Copper Top dropped on to the ground. Yes, he had got his sandals on and the brown suit which the Professor felt was less remarkable than those in the more brilliant colours. And he did not forget his lessons in manners. He advanced to the Doctor with a small arm and hand rigidly extended, and said gravely:

"How do you do? It is a pleasant day."

The Doctor committed the pardonable error of gripping the proffered hand warmly in response, and in a second Copper Top was standing several feet away. He moved backwards up the track across the field while the two men followed. This enabled him to inspect the newcomer at his leisure. He liked the way his bright round eyes twinkled, and he liked the way one of his eyebrows went up higher than the other and gave a little twitch now and then. He had a large nose, and a nice small mouth tucked away under it, and his moustache was dark although his hair was nearly white. Copper Top decided that he was like a bee. That was why he had such a soft boomy voice. He was like a dormouse too. While they sat at tea Copper Top thought of the pictures of the Dormouse in the Wonder Book that Kathleen had bought for him. Doctor Pendlebury was *very* like that dormouse. The more creatures Copper Top found out that he resembled the more he liked him. And he said funny things too, and laughed till he nearly fell off his chair. He even made 'Dophin laugh. Copper Top did not understand all they were saying, but he loved to hear people laugh. When

the Doctor huddled himself up in his chair, shaking all over, and giving funny little squeaks just like a dormouse, Copper Top shouted with glee till the air rippled and rang with it.

"Good gracious, Phin, what a laugh!" said the Doctor, coming up out of his attack. "Put him in the front row and make him laugh and he would pull any farce through. Why it's a fortune! Catching as the Mumps! Good Lord, I haven't had an attack of giggles like that for years. Do you remember old Goodson—when I gave way to one of them in the middle of a wiggling on inattention . . . asked me if I suffered from epilepsy. . . ?"

The two went off into the Professor's study and Copper Top slipped away. He did not know what "Mumps" was, and he disliked any part of the verb to catch. 'Dophin had promised him music after supper. He would go away till then with Wanky and Little Wolf.

"What do you think of the boy?" asked the Professor, when both pipes were going comfortably, and Doctor Pendlebury had expressed unqualified approval of the tobacco.

"A jolly little fellow," he answered cordially. "You've adopted him more or less, I gather?"

"More!" said the Professor, and grunted.

"You won't mind my saying so, but you don't strike me as . . ."

"Of course I don't!" snapped the Professor. "Most unsuitable . . . from one point of view. But I suit Copper Top. The thing is the boy has got to take his place in the world sooner or later. He can't live in the forest with me all his life. And you wouldn't believe"—the Professor ran his hand through his fringe, as if he were plunged in the midst of "The Human Fiasco,"



till it stuck up and stuck out all round his head—"you wouldn't believe, not having children yourself, the extraordinary amount of detail that has to be gone through. Unfortunately for one thing I forgot to have him christened, and the other day that pompous person, Pinniger . . ."

"The Archdeacon?"

"You know him?"

"We were down at Watershed Camp together in 1916. He was Chaplain of the Forces. Wore a martial clerical cloak, and used to preach to the men like one of the old prophets exhorting the Israelites to hew Ammon hip and thigh. The world hasn't changed much, has it? But he's a fine preacher. I was lecturing on venereal disease."

"What!"

"Don't you remember I read for a Medical Degree once? Changed my mind and took a Musical Degree at the last minute."

The Professor nodded. He did not remember, but knew the little man could have taken any degree he liked in his brilliant youth.

"What are you playing with now?" he asked.

"Psycho-analysis. Very interesting! Subconscious mind. Very interesting! Pensinks have asked me to write a book on it. It explains a great deal that has hitherto been puzzling us. . . ."

"Yes . . . yes—I know," interrupted the Professor. "It's explaining everything just now. You people always let these new ideas run away with you. Not that it's really new. History. . . ."

"Exactly," said the Doctor adroitly. "And so Pinniger takes an interest in Copper Top?"

"I hope *not*," said the Professor anxiously. "But

when he called the other day he was asking if the boy knew his Catechism. To tell you the truth I'd never thought of it . . . and in any case I must get him christened first, so I see. I have been reading it—do you remember your Catechism, Pen?"

The Doctor thought. Then his eyebrows twitched. "The pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh," he murmured. "I always like the sound of 'pomps and vanities.' "

"Well! There you are! I might tell Copper Top the world was wicked till I was black in the face. All the world he knows is beautiful. How are you going to tell him what the sinful lusts of the flesh are? Errmph!"

The Professor glared at his friend fiercely.

"Does he play with other children?" asked the Doctor.

"No," said the Professor, rather guiltily. "There aren't any here. He plays with the winds and the water and all the creatures." He told Pendlebury something of Copper Top's close comradeship with all that lived in the great forest, a comradeship which included the very elements. Of his almost uncanny ability to deal with them. The absence of all fear and of how nothing feared him. He told of the difficulty of keeping him within ordinary confines, even of garments, of his swiftness of movement, of his dislike of physical contact even with those he loved. And he told of the radiant joy which dwelt with the boy as an abiding thing.

Pendlebury smoked, and listened, and found himself intensely interested. He did not speak for a while when the Professor had finished.

"You think there is something which cannot be accounted for by any possible heredity, or by unusual environment," he said at length.

"I am sure of it."

"Have you any theory?"

"None that fits."

"I would like to see the little fellow with his birds and beasts . . . and that music? You got it through him of course?"

"In a way," answered the Professor evasively. He was not sure that he wanted to tell Pendlebury of the events of that strange night under the white moon—on the great Uplands. He did not know if it was quite fair to the boy. Perhaps some personal pride held him.

"Come and have a stroll round," he said. "Copper Top may be about, and you may see something. He likes you."

Pendlebury was conscious of feeling quite ridiculously pleased to hear it. A most attractive child certainly. That laugh of his . . . !

They wandered down to the ponds. It was cool and pleasant there. They smoked and talked and watched the fish rise, but Copper Top was not to be seen. The Professor drew various likely spots with caution but no success, until, suddenly, on the edge of a larch-wood glade, he seized the Doctor by the arm and held him tightly.

"Don't pinch," whispered Pendlebury. "I see. By Jove!"

Copper Top was in a tree some distance up the glade, apparently playing hide and seek with a family of squirrels. They watched the game for ten minutes or more and it seemed like no time at all. It was the prettiest sight. Then the boy swung for a moment by one hand from a lower bough and dropped lightly to his feet on the gold-brown needle carpet. Several rabbits were nibbling in the sunshine where the grass was



sweet, and they paid no more heed to him than if he had been another rabbit. He stooped and stroked one of them as one strokes a dog, then passed on up the glade, moving with a curious lightness. A wood-pigeon came circling above the boy's shining head. It settled on his shoulder. The two disappeared together, fading into the green mysterious veil of the larch wood.

Pendlebury looked at the Professor.

"But it isn't just a few that he's tamed!" he exclaimed. "I didn't understand. It's the whole blessed lot!"

"Errmph!" grunted the Professor. "Exactly! The whole blessed lot."

Copper Top came in to supper with amazing punctuality, and watched Dr. Pendlebury eating strawberries and cream with interest.

"There seems no reason why one should ever stop," said the Doctor pensively, as he helped himself for the fourth time, "provided the dish is large enough."

He spoke with affection of a wonderful "food for the gods" called a Dringer, made at a place which he and the Professor talked about as if it had been more wonderful even than the Dringer, a place called Harrow. He spoke of mountains of strawberries and sugar, and rivers of cream, in a cellar restaurant at Copenhagen, and of "Alpine strawberries" soured in wine eaten by the Grand Canal in Venice.

He talked a great deal, but he talked well. He conveyed Copper Top with him to those Gargantuan feasts, in their delightful settings. Copenhagen and Venice were never mere names to Copper Top again.

When the dish of strawberries was quite empty, he concerned himself with the old port, and then, with equal enjoyment, with the Professor's Blütner piano. His beautiful artist's hands touched the ivory keys with the

same delicate appreciation with which they had handled the strawberries and the port. He played Spring Music, and watched Copper Top shivering with delight. Then he played The Bird Song from Siegfried, and suddenly the boy began to sing to it like a violin obligato. It was the soul of the music made audible.

"By Jove!" murmured the Doctor under his breath.

"You knew that before?" he asked at the end.

"No."

"Then how did you know what to sing?"

Copper Top stared at him. "It's here," he said.

"Oh!" The Doctor felt nonplussed. "Well, now I wonder how you will like this."

He looked across at the Professor with his eyebrow twitching, then he looked at Copper Top and began to play.

After the first few bars the boy's face altered. The shining light of rapt anticipation faded into a look of apprehension. It became certainty. It became rage. Something which the Doctor could only compare to lightning, flashed, so it seemed, from the whole boy, and the next moment a small whirling piece of fury fell upon him, striking with legs and arms with such swiftness and ferocity that he lost his balance and found himself comically enough, seated on the floor, protecting his head with both arms.

"Copper Top!" yelled the Professor.

"Mercy!" cried the Doctor. "I don't know what I've done, but I apologise—I give in. Cave!"

Copper Top ceased his onslaught, eluded the Professor's grip without difficulty, and sprang on to the window-sill. Poised there he faced them like an accusing angel. His eyes blazed, his voice was rent with anger.

"You have taken my music and hurt it!" he cried, and vanished into the night outside.

The Professor groaned while the Doctor got up and arranged himself.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I begin to really see your difficulties. The little devil! He's as strong as—well, as I suppose he would be. Muscles . . . yes." He felt himself over carefully. "I shall be a mass of bruises to-morrow."

The Professor wrung his beard with his left hand.

"He will never trust me again with anything!" he said bitterly. "I'm an old fool. I made so sure he would be pleased—I ought to have known. . . ."

"I shall be a mass of bruises to-morrow," repeated the Doctor firmly.

"But how was one to know?" The Professor glared at him angrily as if it were all entirely his fault. "And what did he mean by 'hurting it'? What . . ."

The Doctor put up a deterring hand. "No, James. There I put my foot down. I will not have my music attacked as well as my person."

Then he sat down again, suddenly, on the music stool, and went off into a fit of giggles. He became perfectly helpless. The Professor continued to perambulate the room, and muttered.

Presently the Doctor, by a superhuman effort, recovered sufficiently from his fit of giggles to be sympathetic. That is to say he said:

"Don't go on calling yourself a fool, James, the fact is obvious, and don't twist your beard round any further or you will have it out by the roots, which I understand is painful. Now, see me manage that young wild cat of yours!"



He turned to the piano and began to play Schumann's *Traumerei*, and Doctor Charles Pendlebury was a pianist of some excellence, there was no doubt about it. And he played that night as, he felt, he had never played before. When he had finished he sat quite still and waited. The next moment Copper Top slipped over the window-sill and stood beside him.

"I am sorry I kicked you wiv my feet and knocked you off the stool," he said. "I 'pologise. But I am glad I hit you wiv my fists, and I don't 'pologise. Please play me that again."

Both men knew, with a sense of relief which they felt was out of all due proportion, that they were forgiven. But the Professor remained depressed. That door into another world than his own, which had for a little while mysteriously stood ajar, was, he miserably suspected, finally closed again.

When the music stopped, and Copper Top slipped out once more and vanished into the warm fragrant night, Pendlebury closed the window and played the blue-bell music over again. Then he looked at the Professor.

"Why did he call it 'his' music?" he asked. "You might trust me, Jimmy. I am really interested in the boy."

Whether it was that, or the use of his old college name—no one had called him by it for years—the Professor told him. Told him of all the happenings of that strange night when he had heard the blue-bells play their fairy music and felt the passing of that vast Presence.

Pendlebury sat on the music-stool hunched into a concentrated heap and listened.

"Of course you'll think I'm mad or had some sort of a fit," concluded the Professor. "But there it is! That's

how I got the music. If you could have heard the perfection of it . . .”

“The subconscious mind—” began Pendlebury, and stopped.

“How did I hear with that?”

“You would remember——”

“Then when and where did I hear that music before to remember? When and where was I in touch with that Presence before?”

“Besides,” agreed Pendlebury, “the boy knew the music. He must have heard it too—he called it ‘his.’”

“By the way,” remembered the Professor, “I asked him afterwards about the music. Asked him if he heard it. He said ‘of course’ he had. ‘They were singing like anything.’ And he said ‘everything sings.’”

Phrases came into Pendlebury’s mind that he, like many people, knew well, but hitherto had not attached any very definite meaning to. “The Great Song of the Universe,” “The Music of the Spheres.” Everything sings! God! What an orchestra to listen to. He was intensely interested. Everything sings. The bat’s cry, of course, was the highest note the human ear could hear. What was the lowest? He had heard, he thought. With what consciousness did Copper Top hear? How had the Professor managed to slip into it even for a moment? He was intensely interested.

“Of course,” he said slowly, “I have never denied the possibility that we may possess subtler senses lying within the physical senses, through which we might be able to touch another sphere of consciousness.”

The Professor looked at him out of the shadows around his chair. “You may think me mad, Pen,” he said, “but I find myself being slowly forced into the belief that the boy belongs . . . at any rate partially . . . to

another order of beings. Besides what I have told you there are other things . . . intangible things . . . I can't put it into words. . . ."

He made a little helpless gesture with both hands and began to refill his pipe. The Doctor blew a perfect smoke ring and watched it float upwards. Still hunched into a heap on the music-stool he had almost a gnome-like appearance himself.

"I don't deny the possibility," he said at length. "One can't deny the possibility of anything outside our ken these days. But I don't see that it's a necessity. Have you ever, Phin, felt . . . with me it's always when I first wake up . . . a curious sensation as if all your senses were combined in one sense?"

"No. Sounds like the sixth sense of the old mystics."

"Well, if you had it all the time . . . really properly developed . . . it would be more acute. . . . Birds and beasts they seem to communicate with each other by smell and touch. Suppose you had that sixth sense . . . wouldn't much more vital intercourse with everything be possible? Why should it stop at birds and beasts? Why shouldn't it include all that we call Nature? It would raise you into another sphere of consciousness. . . ."

The Doctor's mind simply flew about seizing ideas. He had uncurled himself off the music-stool. He paced up and down the room, pipe in mouth. He emitted volumes of smoke even as he spoke.

"If we had that sense at use—under our control—think what we might do with it . . . and the boy . . . if he keeps it . . ."

"God forbid," cried the Professor. "If your theory were correct you don't understand what it would mean. You are only looking at it from your present state of consciousness; from the standpoint of our belief that



bird and beast and plant are just there solely that we may put them to the greatest material use. The boy may have this sixth sense you talk of . . . it's possible enough . . . but it doesn't leave him where we are. He loves these things for their own sakes . . . they are *real* to him . . . they aren't there to be used. They are there because they are wonderful and beautiful. That's the idea you get if you live with the boy. . . . It will be simply horrible for him to have to live in our world when he understands it."

Pendlebury stood sucking hard at his pipe. He tried to grasp the idea the Professor was struggling to convey to him. It was not quite clear in the Professor's mind, or it was difficult to convey in words. Pendlebury's mind seemed to be groping about for it as a man's hand gropes in the dark for something he cannot see.

"I wish the little chap would tell one more . . ." he began.

"He can't," said the Professor. "He doesn't understand why we don't understand; that's how it always seems to me. If you question him it drives him away from you."

A sudden gleam shone in the Doctor's eyes. He retreated again to his music-stool and hunched himself up there once more.

"I wonder . . ." he began, and stopped.

"Well!" grunted the Professor.

"How would it be—it might help enormously, you know—if we try to get into touch with his subconscious mind. I have had some wonderful . . ."

"Certainly not!" shouted the Professor. "Certainly *not*. I won't hear of it. The boy's not a 'case' for your damned experiments." He emerged from his corner out of the shadows, and stood over Pendlebury menacingly.

His beard curved upwards, his eyes glared. "The boy's soul is his own wherever he came from," he continued. "I won't have him touched! Don't you dare!"

Pendlebury covered his head with both arms and laughed. "No, no," he said soothingly. "Of course we won't try it if you don't like the idea. It was only a suggestion. But it's a pity. I have had some wonderful . . ."

"Shut up, Pen, I tell you. I won't hear of it. The very idea makes me sick. Not that you would succeed. Copper Top," the Professor chuckled and cooled down, "Copper Top would be more than a match for you. But I won't have it tried."

"All right," said Pendlebury. He twirled himself round on the music-stool, a little disappointed; a less good-natured man would have been vexed. He began to play again; the blue-bell music in a different key. He hummed as he played. It would make a pretty song he thought.

The Professor returned to his chair and his thoughts. A sixth sense. There was something in the idea. But if it were so, it only made the problem of how to deal with the little chap the more difficult. Pendlebury did not understand. It meant the boy communed with life in a totally different and more real way than other people, and that was not going to make his passage through the world easy. All these speculations led nowhere. He had got to make the boy fit to take his place in the human world . . . among People. Pendlebury was not a bit of use. Psycho-analysis! He gave vent to his feelings in a snort of vehement disgust, and the Doctor came back to his chair and poured himself out another glass of port. He also filled the Professor's glass.

"It is a sin and a shame to drink this most noble port

after smoking," he said. "But it does give one such a feeling of harmony."

The Professor sipped his port and laughed.

"I forgive you," he said. "But I am convinced the less we interfere with that side of the boy the better, though help speculating about it I can't. Eventually, I've got to find him a school that he'll stand, until he goes to Cambridge. He'll be all right at Cambridge, I take it."

Pendlebury nodded, then he grinned.

"I hope I live to see him there," he said.

"Well, he's going to make a fine Greek scholar," said the Professor defiantly. He glared at the Doctor over his glass of port. "He will be able to run and jump and swim against any man. Good Lord, there won't be anyone to touch him! He'll make a fine boxer, too . . . I'm teaching him. . . ."

"Good!" said Pendlebury. "Do you remember . . ."

They fell into reminiscences again, and talked far into the night of old times and old friends.

Before he got into bed the Doctor looked out of his window. It was clear moonlight. The trees whispered softly. The air was very sweet. Under the oak-tree he could see the outline of the boy's figure in the hammock, with the small black dog beside him. On the branch immediately above sat a white owl, with all its feathers fluffed, solemnly asleep.

Pendlebury owned to himself that he was intrigued. He would have liked to explore further into the mystery that surrounded the boy. It was annoying of old Jimmy . . . and yet . . . perhaps he was right. Still . . . He laughed. Without doubt he was feeling like the gentleman who said that if he met a fairy he would want to put it in a cage and watch it.



The next morning he tried to wheedle—and the Doctor was a specious wheedler—something out of Mistress Jones. To his astonishment she refused to answer his questions with every symptom of terror. She further protected herself from him behind her kitchen-table, and made the cryptic remark that “They who would be tempting Providence could expect what they would get.”

Copper Top proved quite as unsatisfactory. At the first question he fled, and only appeared again just as Pendlebury was leaving. He brought with him Little Wolf and Sandy Puss and his pet pigeon to say good-bye. He had a dormouse in his pocket to show Pendlebury “because you are so very like him sometimes,” and they all, with the addition of King Edward, escorted Pendlebury to the top of the woodland path. He was consciously pleased; and when Copper Top said, “Come again soon,” he felt as flattered as if he had received some genuine distinction. Certainly he would come again! He would have liked to make a longer stay now. He almost regretted that dinner at the Portfolio Club. But he had to propose the health of the Guest of the Evening. An important matter. However, he would certainly come again. The boy was a fascinating little fellow. Besides, the whole affair intrigued him. Once or twice on the way to the station he considered making another effort to persuade the Professor to let him try to get into touch with the boy’s subconscious mind. Very interesting—and might be useful. Pendlebury was undoubtedly a little obsessed with psycho-analysis at the moment, but he remembered the Professor’s wrath on the previous evening, and decided it was no use. Very stupid of Jimmy! Perhaps at Cambridge. . . .

He did, however, make another suggestion, after they had carefully thrashed out the possibility of most well-

known schools. He made it at the last minute with his head out of the carriage window as the train moved out of the station.

"Consult some sensible woman," he called.

The Professor nodded vigorously and waved his stick.

"Marion!" he said to himself. "She ought to be back any day now."

## CHAPTER VII

Two days later the flag was flying over Mentmore Castle. The Condors were back. Everybody was pleased. There was, in some vague way, at once more interest and colour in the life of the village.

Certainly while the Family had been away the villagers had thoroughly enjoyed hearing the "chap from London" launch highly coloured invective against the great land-owners. They had relished being told what infinitely superior beings they were themselves. His lurid pictures of vice and luxury among the aristocracy were as good as a cinema play, and they applauded them as such. Some of them, it is possible, yearned to be equally vicious and luxurious, just as boys yearn to be ruthless pirates ruling with strange oaths from blood-stained quarter-decks. But for the most part they had more than a suspicion that if the Family were turned out of the Castle, and their land confiscated for the People, the man who would reign there in his lordship's place would be the "chap from London" himself or one like unto him, and Mentmore village knew what that meant. They preferred the Family. His lordship had always bought his sweets from the Post Mistress ever since he could toddle; "No peppermint bull's-eyes like yours, Mrs. Mankelow," he still said to this very day. He would be round after some before long. Her ladyship would be about again in her bath



chair in the latest hat from Paris, and every girl in the village would be able to copy it. She would be deeply interested in all that had taken place during her absence, from old Thomas Wheatley's last illness to the Blacksmith's twins and Mrs. Boulter's glass eye. Also the Vicar had started a troop of Boy Scouts, and every son's mother was dying to show him off in his uniform.

Now at Cherryston, five miles down the road, what had happened when the Family had to leave owing to so many killed in the war, and Death Duties what they are? The new landlord had turned all the Cherryston people out of their homes, and put his own people in. "Not for us, thank you, young man," said Mrs. Mankelow to the chap from London. "We know the worst of the Family and we stand by them, whatever you in the towns may do."

As for Lady Condor herself, she was enchanted to be back. She had loved her time in Australia. They were dear people. She had nearly cried when she sailed out of Sydney harbour sitting on a deck which seemed covered with flowers, talking of all the kindness she had received, and waving sometimes a handkerchief, sometimes a scarf, at the receding shore. But she had quite cried when she saw the dear white cliffs of England, cried so heartily that she had to go down to her cabin and be made up again, hurriedly, before she was fit to be seen.

"The best part of going away is coming home!" she announced on the first day of her return. She was enthroned under her favourite beech tree having tea. Lord Condor sat on her right hand, his special place at tea time.

"I agree with you, Paddy," he said.

He was a very tall, enormously stout man, so stout that any claim Lady Condor might have to that condition faded

into insignificance when beside him. His voice was very soft and thick, with at the same time the beauty of perfect pronunciation. It seemed to suit him in a quite extraordinary way. His face was perfectly round, the features, in themselves good, partially buried in many rolls of flesh. His whole aspect one of benign good nature. It was only an occasional flash from the twinkling eyes half hidden under their fleshy lids that revealed the keen intelligence which had made him a name in the political world.

The West Highland pack were assembled in various eager attitudes round the tea-table, and both Lord and Lady Condor fed them shamelessly. Their greeting to their mistress on her return had to be seen to be appreciated. It is certain no one had been able to hear themselves speak for the space of five minutes, during which time Lady Condor and the dogs had been one indistinguishable mass, two scarves and one veil were torn into pieces, and she had said, "There, darlings! What! so pleased!" till she was hoarse.

Lord and Lady Hawkhurst were sitting together on a basket sofa with many cushions, and near them, in a small wicker-chair with a small wicker-table all to herself, Marion Rosamund Helen Emily, the sole daughter of the Condor house. She was busy watching her new grandmother, whom she found of quite absorbing interest. She was also making an excellent tea.

"How green it is!" exclaimed Lady Condor for about the twentieth time since her arrival in England. She looked out across her beautiful lawns with the delight of a child. "Was it always so green? Or didn't one notice it? I will never grumble at our climate again. And the trees . . . I had no idea what wonderful things they are. Of course they have wattle-trees—very pretty—and eucalyptus-trees in Australia, but not dear green things

like these." She waved a sugared cake at the beech-leaf canopy above and around her.

"And how good to see you two darlings again. Dear Connie, you are lovelier than ever. And Tony not one bit older except for the little grey in his nice curly hair, which is most becoming. Why should iron-grey hair be so becoming to a man and so trying for a woman? They have all the advantages, don't they? And do tell me . . . am I not really thinner? I have not dared to be weighed for fear of a disappointment! But I think I really am, and without getting wrinkled either. . . ."

"You are lovelier than ever too, Mums," said her son, and meant it.

He himself was a very complete specimen of the best type of the conventional English aristocrat. As immaculate in his morals, his behaviour, and his beliefs as he was in his dress. And yet even on his delicate susceptibilities his mother, with all her oddities, never jarred.

She beamed at him. "Dear Tony! You spoil me. But it is very pleasant. Who was it said you should spare the rod and spoil the child? Solomon, was it not? Yes. Are the flowers more beautiful than usual this year, or is it because I have not seen them for so long? And Tomlins has taken so much trouble to have everything in perfection for our return. I had not the heart to tell him he ought never to have put scarlet geraniums near Dorothy Perkins. I even said they looked very nice——"

"Liars have their portion in the Lake of Fire," said Marion Rosamund Helen Emily in a peculiarly clear and distinct voice.

The remark was followed by silence. Even Lady Condor was momentarily flabbergasted.

"Hush, Ishtar!" said her mother.

Lady Condor looked at Lord Condor, who appeared to



be struggling with a crumb which had gone the wrong way. "Is it the Roman Catholics or the Mormons," she murmured, "who forbid . . . ?"

"I will hush in a minute," said Ishtar very quickly in her clear little voice, "but I do want to ask Grannie if she has told 'nuff lies yet to get her portion. 'Cos I'm not 'lowed to tell lies like grown up people do, and I do so want mine. I should love a little lake of fire, and I would put my ugly new hat in it an' my 'rithmetic book and Nana sometimes and see them burrrrn——"

When Ishtar felt dramatic she had a habit of rolling her r's like a French child.

"That would be very naughty and cruel of you," said Lady Hawkhurst, "And if you have finished your tea you can go, and perhaps Grannie will give you some cake for the gold fish."

Ishtar's eyes remained firmly fixed on Lady Condor. She swiftly seized another slice of bread and butter and began to eat it slowly.

"You're in for it, Marion," murmured Lord Condor, and chuckled. Amusing things, children. He wished he had had the time to see more of his when they were young. Ricky now. . . . His thoughts wandered, as they so often did, to the son who had died at Gallipoli. He used to ask just the same odd questions. Ishtar had a look of him. . . .

"Have you got your portion yet, Grannie?" persisted Ishtar.

"No, darling, not yet," replied Lady Condor thus driven. "But I have no doubt I shall one day. I certainly deserve it," she added, as Ishtar was summarily removed, bread and butter in hand, to the gold fish.

"But what can one do? Even Father Vaughan and Dean Inge don't speak the truth. Though of course I am

sure they are quite honest when they talk all that dreadful nonsense, and believe it is the truth—poor dears. They mean well, I am quite sure, and I used to be sorry for them. But I am not sorry for the Pessimists any longer. It came over me the other day on board ship when I was reading something the poor Dean had written. If you think nobody is any good at all it makes things so simple. Because there is, of course, nothing to be done except tell them so. But the poor Optimists, who think well of everybody, they, of course, must get such dreadful disappointments, and they go on trying to make people good—and that must be much harder work, than telling them how bad they are.”

Lord Hawkhurst giggled. He loved what his brother Ricky used to call “Mother’s ingenious nonsense.” It was extremely good to hear some of it again. Extremely good to see her once more having tea under the old beech tree with his father sitting in his usual odd position at her elbow, occasionally pouring the wrong liquid into the wrong utensil with an amiable desire to be helpful. As Ricky used to say, “Alice’s Mad Tea-Party wasn’t in it.”

“Why on earth did we ever go away for five whole years, Condor?” asked Lady Condor, changing the subject with her usual suddenness. “It was most foolish and a long time out of three-score years and ten, which is a wretched allowance, whatever David may have thought of it. But now I see there is a man who has found out how to make us live for ever by grafting something out of a monkey into us. Only unfortunately he died himself—or was it the man he grafted? And how dreadful if the man turned into a monkey like a briar rose turns into a tea when you graft on to it. One can never tell with all these new experiments, can one?”

"The man it was who died," quoted her son. "So the renewed youth scare is over for the present."

"Ah, now I remember!" exclaimed Lady Condor. "Yes! It didn't seem to make one *look* young, it only made one feel young, didn't it? And that might lead to most difficult situations. What a mercy the man died, for us as well as for the poor monkeys. Do you remember the one we had when you were all children, Tony? It used to cry if we left it alone, and cling to us with its little hands. Do they really cut glands out of them while they are still alive? But where were we? Oh—yes! What a merciful thing the man died of it—you know what I mean—as the doctors would have insisted on us all being grafted. There is a visitor coming up the drive! But never mind. I said 'not at home' our first day, except to dear Arthur, and he is coming to dinner."

Lord Condor craned a long neck from his chair so that he too could see over the yew hedge.

"I know that walk," he said. "Who the devil— why, it's Jim Godolphin by all that's wonderful——"

"Run, Tony dear, and say we are all here!" cried Lady Condor. "Fancy him coming to see us at once——"

"I'll go," interposed Lord Condor, heaving his massive weight out of his chair. "I should like a chat with old Jimmy before you get hold of him, Marion. No one else has a look in then!"

He smiled at her and moved away with the surprisingly light step of the very stout man.

"Dear James!" Lady Condor continued to exclaim. "How very nice of him! He must have missed me more than he expected. And good gracious—the baby! I had almost forgotten it! What has happened to the baby, I wonder? Have either of you seen anything of James?"

"Nothing," answered her son. "I believe he made a



most amazing speech in Fairbridge a little while ago. Everyone was talking about it. He took the chair for old Elwyn Clough, who was speaking on the Darwinian Theory or something of the sort. The Hall was packed I heard. I suppose that was why Pinniger asked James to take the chair. He was a draw, of course."

"I would have loved to have been there," sighed Lady Condor. "It is too bad. I attend so many dull meetings—and dear James shocked them terribly, I suppose."

"I don't know. When people mentioned it to me I changed the subject. After all, James is our cousin, though only a second one. One dislikes his—his impossible views," concluded Lord Hawkhurst.

"I did hear something about the baby," said Lady Hawkhurst. "Now what was it?"

"It would be about Ishtar's age," said Lady Condor. "It was found the day she was born, I remember."

"What did I hear?" Lady Hawkhurst continued. "The child plays with all the wild creatures, and goes about with nothing on or something of the sort. Though of course that cannot be true. It would not be allowed I should not think, even in a forest."

"Of course not," said her husband. "But a child brought up by James is probably peculiar, to say the least of it."

"P'raps he wears skins," suggested Ishtar hopefully. She had returned as soon as was possible from the gold fish. She found her Grandmother of infinitely greater interest, and she saw to it that she was peacefully seated in her little wicker-chair, nursing her Teddy Bear, when Lady Condor and the Professor settled down later on to a tête-à-tête under the beech tree. She wanted dreadfully to hear some more about the boy who played with the wild creatures and perhaps dressed in skins. Perhaps

they were wolf skins! Perhaps there were still wolves away in the big forest. She did not care if there were! She would like to go and see the boy who played with the wild creatures. Perhaps even he played with the wolves. Her eyes shone. She sat very very quiet and listened.

The Professor beamed at Lady Condor. "I am profoundly glad to see you back, Marion," he said.

Lady Condor beamed at him. "That means you have been getting into mischief, James, and want me to get you out of it," she answered. The idea evidently pleased her. "What terrible scrapes I used to help you out of when you were a boy. Do you remember——?"

"I do, Marion," said the Professor, cutting the reminiscence off at its birth, considerably to Ishtar's disappointment. "And I want your help now. It is about the boy . . ."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Condor, with unusual brevity.

"You see," began the Professor, and took off his hat for it was a close evening.

"James! What a curious hat," interrupted Lady Condor. "Where did you buy——?"

"I don't know," answered the Professor hurriedly. "You see while you have been away I wrote another book . . ."

"Oh yes, dear James! I saw it advertised. 'The Human Fandango,' isn't it? Such an interesting title I thought . . . but surely a Fandango is something Spanish. . . ."

"Fiasco," said the Professor. "Well, it took all my time—naturally, and I quite forgot to have the boy christened. . . ."

"But how do you know he was not christened when you found him?"

"God bless my soul, Marion, I never thought of it!" He looked at her with sincere admiration. "Then you think there is no need . . . ?"

"Most children *are* christened before they are six months old," said Lady Condor thoughtfully, "but of course we do not know under what name. By the way, James, what is his name?"

The Professor distorted the shape of his beard in a guilty manner.

"Well," he said, "he is always called Copper Top, but for—well for official purposes I've given his name as James Godolphin, after myself."

"James!" And for once Lady Condor restricted the expression of her feelings to one word.

The Professor took a more firm hold of his beard and looked across the terraced gardens to the wide stretch of open park beyond, and then to the soft masses of the great forest stretching up and up to the far hills. The sun had just dipped below the horizon. They lay bathed in the after-glow, infinitely remote and desirable.

"Yes, I know, Marion," he said very gently for him. "I know every word that you want to say. Errmph! Yes. But as it happens, I am as fond of the little chap as if he were the one who went with Margot long ago—so you see——"

"Yes, dear James, I see," answered Lady Condor, and hunted for her handkerchief because there were ridiculous tears suddenly in her eyes. She thought of Ricky, and of that grave with the wooden cross, as she so often did in spite of her enjoyment of life. "There are feelings you can't reason with. That sort for instance. Perhaps they are beyond Reason . . . because there must be something beyond Reason, mustn't there? It would be so dreadful if there were not. But where were we? Oh,



yes! The christening. I think he must certainly have been christened, but perhaps it would be safest to have it done again. What happens if you are not christened? Is it you cannot be buried—at least not in the proper place? Of course, too, it may not be legal to be christened twice, a sort of bigamy, you know. James, I am getting dreadfully muddled. Would it not be wise to consult Condor?"

"I am more inclined to leave it that he has already been christened," said the Professor. "I can't think why I did not think of that before. Neither did Pendlebury. You see . . ." He paused, wondering if he should tell her some of the difficulties that might attend any attempt to christen Copper Top. Since his attack on Charles Pendlebury over the blue-bell music, the Professor was more than ever doubtful as to what might happen. Such an attack on the Archdeacon in full canonicals in a sacred edifice—it did not bear thinking of. Even on the little Mentmore parson it would be most unseemly. Finally he decided not to tell Lady Condor. It might prejudice her against the boy before she had seen him.

In the meantime Lady Condor had not ceased to talk, and had become inextricably mixed up between Baptism, Registration, and Vaccination, before he turned his attention to her again.

"You know, James, it is really rather dreadful how ignorant we are of the things one has done to one's children," she was saying when he did. "One has them christened always, of course, and I have been Godmother to quite a large number of babies, and now I come to think of it I promised quite a number of important things in their name. I believe I vowed them, or is that in another service? But how can you make other people keep promises you have made? Though I have always

sent them presents on their birthdays. Miss Tucker reminds me of them as they come round—it is the only way. But whether they keep my promises or not, of course I do not know. I can't quite remember what I did promise. I believe there was something about picking and stealing—but of course they would not do that! Have you ever been a Godfather, James?"

"Never," said the Professor. "But I read the Catechism the other day, and I can tell you what you did promise."

"I think, dear James, I had rather you did not. But I will make a point of reading all the promises before I am a Godmother again. And now you mention it I think you have to see that they know the Catechism. But I expect the governesses really always see to that. I know mine did, because my poor dear Ricky asked the most awkward questions. I had to distract his mind, I remember, with 'The Swiss Family Robinson'."

"Marion!" exclaimed the Professor; his mind had been wandering among his own thoughts again. "You are undoubtedly the most wonderful woman! You have entirely set my mind at rest over this matter! Without doubt the boy had already been christened when I found him. In any case it will not be long now before he can promise things for himself."

"But there still remains the question of vaccination," said Lady Condor. "Has the child any marks?"

"Not a sign of one!" exclaimed the Professor triumphantly. "There, Marion, I want no advice. I am on my own ground. I have studied the matter thoroughly, and I am a Conscientious Objector."

"Of course, dear James! You would be! But pray do not call yourself one! Because they got such a dreadful name in the war, and I know Tony would not like people

to think we had one in the family. Do call yourself an Anti-Vaccinationist or something like that. But suppose the child gets smallpox?"

"Five million chances to one against it!" exclaimed the Professor. "And to insure against such odds you suggest that I should submit the child to a dose of blood poisoning from calf pus . . ."

"No, dear James, I do not. . . ."

"The National Health Bill stamped out smallpox. . . ."

"Of course, James, when your beard is at that angle I know it is useless . . ."

"But unfortunately Vaccination got the credit, and is now firmly established as one of the fetishes of our civilisation—so-called," the Professor continued firmly. "It will remain a Fetish, I suppose, when people have forgotten what smallpox was. We are ruled by Fetishes! Our present Medical Fetish is the pitting of poison against poison in the human body, playing monkey tricks with the blood of the race . . ."

"I wish you would leave off talking business," broke in a piteous little voice. "I do want to hear about the boy who plays with the wild creatures and dresses in skins, and Nana will be here directly——"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Professor. "Who are you, little lady?"

He looked at Ishtar for the first time. She was sitting bolt upright in her chair, her small hands tightly clasped together above two slim straight legs cased in white silk. Her face was a very decided oval. Her eyes big and grey and set rather widely apart under pathetic eyebrows and a soft burnished wave of fair hair as in a Romney picture. Her mouth was small and curved. She made the Professor think of a dignified white Persian kitten.



"I am Ishtar," she said. "And I want you to tell me about the boy who plays with the wild creatures, and if he wears wolf skins."

"Well, no, he doesn't," said the Professor. "You see there aren't any wolves in our forest."

Ishtar sighed. "I was 'fraid there wouldn't be. It's like the Lake of Fire."

"But there are lots of other things. Deer and squirrels and rabbits, you know, and birds. He plays with them \_\_\_\_\_"

Suddenly Ishtar came close and laid a small urgent hand upon his knee. Her white flower face assumed an imperative aspect.

"Ask Grannie for me to stay annuzer five minutes!" she whispered hurriedly, and the Professor became aware that a capped and aproned Being had appeared on the horizon.

Ishtar's great eyes met his in comradeship. She knew this man was on her side. Of course he would pick her up and hold her at an uncomfortable angle on a hard knee. He would kiss her. She shivered a little. He had a beard. Beards were scrubbly things. They had such a funny fuzzly feel. She hated it. But she badly wanted the extra five minutes.

"Marion," said the Professor, "ward bedtime off for a bit." And to Ishtar's relief and astonishment he did not pick her up, he did not even put one of those dreadfully uncomfortable arms round her to drag her closer to him. He did not touch the small hand upon his knee. But he stuck his beard out at a comical angle and smiled. His eyes were the same colour as the sky. She liked his face.

Lady Condor rose from her chair. "Why, here is Nana," she said briskly. "I have not had a word with

her yet. I have not even asked after her rheumatism." She billowed towards Nana, talking as she went. Connie was not far away, and Connie was a martinet. She had been adamant in the days when Grannie had asked for an extra few minutes at bedtime for Ishtar's brothers. Lady Condor became positively engrossed in Nana's rheumatic symptoms.

"Don't the 'quirrels run away?" asked Ishtar. "They always do. Right up high in the trees. Even when I take them nuts they won't come."

"No, they don't run away," said the Professor.

"Why don't they?"

"That's what I don't know myself," replied the Professor.

"Won't he tell you?"

"He would tell me I expect if I could understand."

Ishtar pressed her small hands tightly together. "I would so love to," she said. "John says there are no such things as Fairies, or the Sleeping Beauty, or real Peter Pans, but there *is* butterflies, and 'quirrels, and tiny little birds, but they're no good when they all fly away and won't play. Do you think you could ask me to come and play with your boy?"

She poured it all out breathlessly for her time was short.

"Of course I could," replied the Professor. "I'll fix it up with Grannie this very minute. Then you can ask him all about it, can't you?"

He was delighted. A great thing for Copper Top. Another child to play with. And he would probably like this small white maiden. An attractive little piece of femininity. A pity she must grow up. A pity Copper Top must grow up. A Peter Pan! Why not a real Peter Pan?

"Do you think he'd teach me how to make the 'quirrels not afraid?"

"Well, why not?"

"And does he run about in the woods just as he likes?"

"Well, pretty much," said the Professor guardedly.

Ishtar's hands were now clasped tightly against her small chest. Her eyes shone. It was almost too much. Lady Condor and Nana approached.

"You won't forget," she implored.

"You may depend on me," replied the Professor earnestly.

"Now say good night, Miss Ishtar, and come along," said the Voice of Authority.

Ishtar said good night. Her handshake with the Professor was almost a ritual, so solemn was it, so full of meaning. The small figure moved away obediently by Nana's side and probably only the Professor at all understood the wealth of revolt hidden under that good little exterior. But Ishtar had something of the same dignity as the Pekinese dog. Like it she submitted because of her helplessness in stronger hands, and she abhorred the indignity of a futile struggle. Usually on these occasions she could willingly have placed Nana in the Lake of Fire or anywhere else that would have safely removed her, but to-night a vision of freedom and lawlessness had flashed upon her. She was going to play with the boy who lived in the forest, who played with the deer and rabbits and squirrels and with the birds and butterflies. It seemed almost too good to be true. But she had faith in the Professor. Mums and Nana often promised things which never came to pass, not *really*. The Professor was a different matter. Somehow she felt he would produce the real thing. And he had not kissed her. He was a funny man. She liked him.



Which showed that Copper Top had succeeded in educating the Professor to some extent, just as the Professor had succeeded to some extent in educating him.

“And now, dear James, where were we?” asked Lady Condor, returning to her chair. “And what do you think of the only girl of the Family? I am foolishly and hopelessly in love with the darling. She is to spend the rest of the summer with me while Hawkhurst and Connie do the usual round. They like it still—what there is left of it—London, Cowes, Scotland—yes—but Condor and I have decided to stay at home. Just a week or two in Scotland perhaps. And Ishtar is to stay with us and Heaven alone knows what will happen. I shall be as wax in her hands. Wax! And dear Connie has trained her so beautifully it is really a pity. She will return and find us all, even Nana, as doormats before Ishtar. But I do not tell her so. Sometimes I suspect,” she looked at the Professor comically, “that it will be a blessing in disguise. The child’s body is obedient—terribly obedient—but her mind is in rebellion. To tell you the truth, James, and I have never dared reveal it to anyone else, I mistrust very good children. My poor dear Ricky was always in mischief—he fell into the manure-water pond in his best velvet suit once being Blondin on the tight rope—that sort of thing—very tiresome of course—and Condor would whip him—though I explained that it showed imagination—and you know what Ricky was when he grew up.”

The Professor nodded. His silence was full of sympathy. He agreed with Marion entirely. She was the most understanding woman he had ever met. He knew exactly what she was driving at and he agreed with her entirely.

“This little chap of mine, Marion——” he began.

"Of course," exclaimed Lady Condor. "That is where we were! I could not remember. Now tell me all about him. I forgot if we settled whether he was baptised or not."

"I propose to leave that matter in abeyance until the boy is old enough to consider these things for himself," said the Professor magisterially. "But his Education is becoming an anxiety to me——"

"I think, dear James," interrupted Lady Condor, "you had better make a clean breast of it."

And the Professor did so. He told her briefly but sufficiently as nearly as he could the evolution of Copper Top since he had picked him up off the forest pathway to the present moment. And Lady Condor was so interested that except for some odd exclamations and chuckles she never interrupted him once.

When he had finished she remained in profound thought for the space of two minutes and came out of it with her usual suddenness.

"Do I understand, James, that the child has never been outside the forest?"

"No, Marion."

"He has never seen a Town or a Village or a Railway or other Children or People——?"

"No, Marion, of course he has not!"

"And he has learnt nothing except what you have taught him?"

"He has not."

"Dear! Dear!" said Lady Condor. She looked all round her in a helpless way. At Hawkhurst and Connie returning from their usual little constitutional together, at her husband strolling along the path that led from the farm, at one of the men-servants pulling up the sun-blinds outside the drawing-room windows. By all these

signs she knew that in exactly five minutes the dressing gong would sound.

"Dear! Dear!" she said again and looked at the Professor. He met the look with one in which guilt and defiance were justly mingled. Lady Condor chuckled. Her chuckle was as infectious as her smile.

"James!" she exclaimed, "I ought to scold you! But how can I? Because I am delighted with the whole affair. It is like a real live Barrie play! It is most amusing. And Ishtar——" She stopped quite suddenly. Lady Hawkhurst's graceful figure, moving with perfect dignity, crossed her line of vision, on the way in to dress for dinner. Lord Condor had stopped at a rose tree and was busy pinching a caterpillar to death in his tightly-rolled green shelter.

"Dear James! Perhaps I had better come out and see your little man—he sounds delightful—but still one has responsibilities. . . ." Her eyes dwelt on Lord Hawkhurst's well-groomed back following his wife's into the Castle. "I will come up in the bath chair the very first free afternoon I have. And then you shall have my considered opinion as to what is the best thing to be done."

She rose, and felt she had escaped a possible danger. Without due forethought she might easily have found herself on the horns of a serious dilemma—though why horns? From which she could only have extricated herself by hurting James' feelings. He was evidently devoted to the boy. But though the boy sounded lovely he might be impossible—quite impossible. After all there was a cowboy at the Cottage—and children picked up things—generally the bad ones—not the good—why——?

The Professor picked up Lady Condor's things. A parasol, a handkerchief, a half withered rose and a bead



bag. He knew everything that was passing through Lady Condor's mind, but he could afford to ignore it. He had faith in Ishtar. Also he had faith in Copper Top's charm.

He went home very satisfied with his visit and happier in his mind about the boy than he had been for some time. The best teacher for a boy is a girl. Boys who had sisters—girls who had brothers—always better equipped to face the world. And Copper Top would have a child to play with, a good thing. Marion. He chuckled as he plodded up the forest path. Marion meant to inspect Copper Top before she allowed Ishtar to come.

## CHAPTER VIII

LADY CONDOR undoubtedly felt that Copper Top should be interviewed and very carefully inspected before her small grand-daughter was allowed to play with him. She also decided to take Mr. Fothersley with her on her visit of inspection. She would be fortified by his opinion. Arthur Fothersley was as strictly conventional as dear Connie herself. If the boy were in any way unsuitable as a companion for Ishtar he would not be carried away by the charm which appealed even in mere description. Yes, she would take Arthur, and then, after due consultation, if they thought it advisable, she would ask the little fellow down to the Castle sometimes to play with Ishtar. In the forest—no! It would be far better not.

So Lady Condor proposed, but the Professor's faith was not misplaced and Ishtar disposed otherwise.

She pursued her desire with the terrible persistence of a small blue-bottle. Toys and sweets, picnics and children's parties, even the start of haymaking raised no enthusiasm in her small breast.

"I want to see the boy who plays with 'quirrels," was her invariable cry, whether Grannie returned from town with the car full of toys or motored her to Brighton to dig on the sands.

The boy who played with 'quirrels stood now in her mind for Freedom, for a Life in which you came and went at your own will. In which there were no regular times or seasons fixed and unalterable for all things. A world in which you lived and moved free from any ruling

power that ordered things just as it chose—stupidly and unreasonably it seemed to Ishtar, that was always saying “don’t” or “do” as the case might be, often for no apparent reason whatsoever. Ishtar did what she was told, she was looked upon more or less by her parents as a model child, and it was only Lady Condor who suspected that her good behaviour was of the same description as that of the Pekinese dog, that underneath her outward small dignified personality seethed something that might astonish dear Connie one of these days. That passionate craving for man’s unalienable right to Liberty, to personal initiative. Every day Lady Condor noticed more and more that likeness which her husband had seen on their first evening at home to the son who was buried at Gallipoli. The likeness was not only physical, it was also mental, a resemblance of outlook, a curious application of the word “Why.” Ricky had been more trouble than all the other boys, but how funny, how deliciously funny, his worst exploits had been and the terrible things he used to say! Lady Condor giggled even now when odd expressions of his came back to her. But how glad and gay a thing he had made of his few short years of life. An anxiety—yes. It would never do if Ishtar really took after him. And yet how much more interesting she would be than if she were like dear Connie. Lady Condor hurriedly put this thought away from her, for it savoured of disloyalty. Connie had made Tony an admirable wife, and she had been an equally admirable daughter-in-law. Her two boys were everything that one could possibly wish. Their health, their school reports, their general behaviour, all were excellent. Their outlook on life was that of their father and his father before him, and his father before that. They were absolutely true to type and a very fine type it was.



Lady Condor reminded herself of all this, because her thoughts were rather like England, they generally muddled through somehow, and they had on this occasion muddled through to the dreadful fact that she had really quite wished, though only for a few moments, that Ishtar really would astonish dear Connie one of these days. In quite a nice way of course.

Seeing the small person flitting about the garden like a white butterfly it was quite impossible to imagine her being anything but quite nice. Still there was that undoubted likeness to poor dear Ricky. Lady Condor chuckled even with the tears in her eyes. She had never been able to deny him anything. She was equally unable to resist Ishtar. So when she finally started for the Little House in the forest to inspect Copper Top Ishtar sat triumphantly upon her knee.

Her eyes shone; in her usually pale little face bloomed two soft roses. Her hands were clasped tightly together in her lap. Only the discipline of her lifetime kept her quiet. Indeed she hardly knew how much she wanted to sing, to make a noise of some sort. She was out on an adventure for the very first time in her life. It was that lavish thing a morning in a fine July. The world was full of warmth, of fragrance, of song. Ishtar was conscious of all three as a Unity. They blent into one perfect thing. A passion and a call were in her blood, and she herself was a vibrating centre of complete and for the moment sufficing happiness. Presently, however, she would get away from Grannie and Uncle Arthur and the bath chair and slip off with the boy who played with the creatures, into the green wonder world which for her had only lain hitherto on each side of her path. She was going to step out of the path into it all and find . . . What would she find? She did not know. She only

knew it must be something thrilling. Something Peter Pannish. She shivered with anticipation, with delight.

The green world gleamed and whispered. It looked at her with soft, lustrous eyes. She wondered when she would see the Boy. She made a picture of him in her mind, like a picture she had seen in a book, with little wings of gold in his hair, and little wings of gold on his feet. She wondered if he would tell her how to make the creatures and the birds not afraid. She wondered if he would like her. Her brothers, some years older than she was, adored her, and had never made her feel her inferiority as a female thing. She thought the boy would be sure to like her.

Lady Condor chattered, and Mr. Fothersley and Rob had various altercations, and the little dogs shrieked with the ecstasy of the chase among the undergrowth. Ishtar was oblivious to them all. She felt that the day of her life had come, and she was free to enjoy it as she would. She had never been out before without Mummy or Nana. Grannie somehow did not count. Grannie indeed was part of it. She was glad when the path began to wind up hill. She knew it had to be up hill. She began to look out for the Boy. Among the red boles of the fir trees seemed a likely place to meet him, or here, where the great green ferns grew like fans under the sunshiny leaves and there were thousands of little gold gnats like a tangled veil.

But nothing happened. Rob struggled on and up and Grannie talked. And presently they came out into open fields, and there were cows and a donkey, and a Little Little House and Cousin James. Cousin James lifted her off Grannie's knee and put her down on the garden path, but he did not say anything about the Boy. He and Grannie both talked at once, about something which had

happened in the paper, and Uncle Arthur sat under a tree getting himself cool. Ishtar waited a little. Then she peeped over the low window-sill of the funny little house into a big room full of books. He was not there. A little further away she saw lots of flowers; he might be among them. She went on. There were heaps of flowers all over the place. Not a bit tidy, but Ishtar liked them. They smelt very sweet. She wished there were not so many bees getting honey out of the tall blue flowers. She was rather afraid of bees. But the spirit of adventure was upon her. She would not go back. The Voices were growing more and more distant. There were butterflies everywhere. Lots more than she had ever seen before. She went down another little path. There were lilies here, enormous lilies, white with gold brown velvet in their insides. They smelt wonderful, and all about their feet grew blue flowers like eyes looking at her, and heaps of other littler flowers. They all looked at her. They seemed to know why she was here. The path was covered with moss just like green velvet covered with gold stars. She thought a moss path much prettier than gravel. It ran into a wood and then it spread out into a carpet. She was a little afraid now. The trees looked very big and they made a strange noise as of something mysterious coming. She could not hear Grannie's voice any longer. But beyond the big trees, quite a good bit beyond, there was a lovely fairy-looking place, where the sun was shining on lots of leaves. They went dipple dapple, laughing and whispering to one another.

She went on. Her little white figure moved warily. She glanced from side to side. She was alone; all alone in a forest. Mingled delight and terror stirred within her. Surely the Boy would come soon.

She reached the sunlight again, and when she found



herself in it then she knew how frightened she had been among the big trees where the deep shadows watched. Here there were little bushes, very green, with dainty fairy leaves moving softly, playing with the little breezes that smelt so good; and all around, wrapped in sunshine and quiet, looking down at her from far far up in the blue and white sky were more big trees; but she was not frightened of them any more.

Winding in and out, appearing and disappearing between the big trees, was a wide green pathway. At the end of it she could see the tall red boles of fir trees all in a misty veil. The air seemed full of dancing gold. It was a lovely place.

She went a little way down the green pathway and saw that there were birds flying in the gold. Other birds were singing.

And then the Boy came.

He came with sun and wind and the sound of laughter and the song of the whole world. Even the leaves sang all around, even the little grasses among which her small white feet stood.

He came flying among the tree trunks, in and out of the shade and the sun, like a bit of the wind incarnate. The birds glanced and shone around his head through the gold mist. He was singing, a song without words, but it did not need any words.

Ishtar held her breath. Her hands were crossed just beneath her chin. She dared not move. It was a fairy tale come true. She believed in fairies. She did not care what anyone said! She believed in fairies. Perhaps the Boy was a Fairy really. Not just a Boy. A Peter Pan sort of fairy. And she was not asleep. She shut her eyes very tightly for one second and opened them again quickly. She was wide awake and it was real morning.

And the Boy had stopped running and was looking at her. He was the realist thing she had ever seen, the most alive. He looked at her very swiftly, he took in all of her at once. Oh! she wished Nana had let her wear her pretty hat, the hat she liked. Not this old thing.

She tore it off and threw it on the ground and stood with her adorable little head bare, and she looked back at the Boy and smiled.

Copper Top smiled too. They looked at each other from a little distance for quite a long time. He saw that she was as perfect as any flower of earth, as any star of heaven. They moved nearer to each other.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Ishtar," she whispered, and went close to him and kissed him on the cheek with her soft little mouth.

"I like it," he said gravely. "Where do you come from, Star?"

"From Mentmore Castle," she said.

He looked disappointed, and she could not think why. She knew most people liked to meet those who lived in a Castle.

"I thought perhaps you came from where I did," he said.

"Where is that, Boy?"

Copper Top knitted his wide smooth brows. For a moment his shining face darkened, just as you may see a bright day darken when a little cloud floats momentarily over the sun.

"I cannot remember," he said. "It was everywhere, not just here."

"Was it very long ago?" she asked.

"Sometimes it seems a very long time," said Copper Top.

"Does it make you sad?"

"Why should it make me sad?" he asked. "It is very pleasant here. Have you come to stay too, Star?"

Ishtar shook her head. Her mouth drooped mournfully. "I shall have to go soon, I 'spect," she said. "I came with Grannie. She will have to get back in time for lunch. We always have to get back in time for something."

"We don't here," said Copper Top. "Things wait for us. Why shouldn't they?"

Ishtar did not know. She sighed a little. "I'm always waiting for things or being in time for them," she said.

"That is a great pity," said Copper Top gravely. "I think you had better stop with us. We do not bother about those things here. It is very pleasant."

He stood with his shining bare feet on the moss carpet. They were lovely feet. The sun was in his hair. The corners of his wide smiling mouth held secrets. There was a dimple which came and went in his cheek. Ishtar loved him very much.

"Will you show me how to play with the 'quirrels and little rabbits?" she asked.

"Why, that is easy enough!" said the Boy, and laughed. His laughter ran along the gold that shivered in the air and made it into waves.

"Come!" he called, and was gone over the moss and the leaves in a flash.

Ishtar ran too as fast as she could. Then she cried out and he came back to her. The cry sounded like one of his bird friends in distress.

She slipped her hand into his and they walked together. Though she clung to his hand he did not mind. He liked the big silk wave on top of her head. He liked the fine texture of her skin, and the way the blood ebbed and flowed under it. He liked her wide solemn eyes and



the curve of her mouth and her frock of white lace and her little white shoes. If she wanted to walk slowly he did not mind. He could look at her.

They looked at each other, absorbing various details. Ishtar knew quite a number of little boys and she wondered why this boy felt "different somehow." Because there was nothing really different—not that she could see. He had not the little wings of gold, but then he did not need them. He moved like the wind. Birds flew all round him closer than she had ever seen them flying. She liked that. She could see the little soft fluff lining under their wings. Their bright eyes looking into hers. The boy brought the birds. . . . A great dragon-fly darted and flashed across the sun track and she cried out with joy. Copper Top liked the sound of her cry. He held out his free hand and the beautiful creature flashed back again and settled there with its rainbow wings quivering. Ishtar saw its face—its eyes.

"It has a face," she said.

"Why not?" asked Copper Top.

The dragon-fly flashed away again and Copper Top led her on out of the pathway into the flickering shadow of a great beech tree. The gold-brown last-year leaves rustled beneath her feet, the shells of last-year nuts crackled. Copper Top had never seen any little girls except those who lived in the keeper's cottage on the other side of the forest, and he had always kept away from them because he disliked the sound of their voices. This girl's voice was soft and clear like the tinkling of falling streams, and when she spoke the words sang. He wanted her to speak again.

"Lots of squirrels live in this tree," he said.

"Will they come down?"

Copper Top called. It was like the note of a bird, but

nothing happened. He called again. Then he looked at Ishtar.

"Seems as if they're 'fraid of you like they're 'fraid of 'Dophin," he said.

He caught a low branch in one hand and swung himself up into the tree, springing from fork to fork until he disappeared from sight. A moment later his face gleamed down on her from very high up among the sway and flicker of thousands of leaves. A squirrel sat upon his shoulder.

"Come up," he called. "I won't let it run away."

"I *can't!*" she called back desperately.

"Why not?" asked Copper Top.

He came down a little further and sat in a fork of the tree with his bare feet swinging. The squirrel came with him. Another peeped from the branch above his head, bright-eyed, inquisitive.

It was too much! For one impossible moment Ishtar felt she must—she would do as Copper Top had done. She took a step forward, looked up again to the dizzy height where he sat laughing among the squirrels, and quailed before it.

"I can't climb a tree," she wailed despairingly. "I've never been 'lowed to climb."

Copper Top began to understand. She was not like himself. She was like all the other people he knew. It gave him a funny aching feeling somewhere inside him. But he knew from her voice that she had an ache too. He slipped down to the ground and stood looking at her thoughtfully. Her eyes reminded him of the little pools high up on the moorland among the myrtle and heather. He liked to look at her. But it was a pity she could not run, or climb in the trees. He would so have loved her to come with him high up, and rock in their

lovely topmost branches and sing to the sky and the clouds and the dear stars and the big moon. And why were the creatures afraid of her? She was small and sweet and white, and surely she would never hurt anything—yet they were afraid of her.

A shadow, not from the sky or the trees, dimmed the light of his beautiful world. He did not know what to do because he did not know what was wrong. Why were the creatures all afraid of her? Nothing had ever feared him. Trouble had come with this small exquisite person into the cheerful peace of his green world. Something which hurt looked at him out of the face which was like some wonderful flower. It was new to him. He had never seen it before. He did not understand.

Ishtar saw only a clear shining content in his beautiful strange face, and she felt angry with him. He looked so dreadfully happy when she was so miserable. And she had looked forward so to playing with him and the squirrels. Of course he thought she was a little stupid. . . .

Copper Top saw the little soft fold of her underlip begin to quiver, and he felt at once that he liked her very much in spite of everything. He wanted to comfort her. It must be pretty nasty to have everything afraid of you.

"Look here," he said, "I'm sorry about the squirrels. Will a pigeon do?"

Ishtar shook her head. "Joan has tame pigeons," she complained. "It's the wild creatures I want. The 'quirrels or even a little tiny tiny wild rabbit. The ones that run with little white tails."

Copper Top smiled and vanished. Ishtar had hardly time to be frightened or to wonder what Grannie might be thinking, before he was back again, holding between



his hands a small ball of fur. A tiny rabbit, the tiniest Ishtar had ever seen. Yet it was quite grown up in its ways. It twitched its long ears and its funny little nose and sat up and nibbled delicately at a young dandelion Copper Top had found for it.

Ishtar was delighted. She loved it.

"Oh, let me have it!" she cried, and held out eager hands.

The rabbit jumped a clear three feet in the air over Copper Top's shoulder and away, and Copper Top laughed. His laughter seemed to run with the rabbit along the sun-washed glade.

Ishtar was torn in two. It was nasty of him to laugh, yet she wanted badly to laugh herself. She made an effort to be offended. She set her mouth firmly, but felt the corners twitch. Like the rabbit's nose she thought, and a little chuckle of laughter bubbled over.

"That's right," said Copper Top with a nod. "It's no use being mis'erable. You've just got to find out how."

"But how can I find out?" she asked.

Copper Top thought for a moment.

"I think you had better come and live with us," he said. "They're not so 'fraid of 'Dophin as they used to be."

"Who is 'Dophin?"

Copper Top stared. That anyone did not know who 'Dophin was, was most odd.

"We live together," he said.

"You mean my Cousin James," said Ishtar.

Copper Top nodded. "That's one of his other names."

A whistle something like the call of a bird startled the air. "That's him calling me," Copper Top added. "He's got someone with him. Someone making a noise. Shall we hide so's they can't get you back?"

His eyes danced, so did his feet among the leaves. He wished she could climb. Of course they could hide down here. Only it would have been more fun to hide in a tree and watch the people hunting. His face danced with mischief.

"Let's hide!" he cried, and held out his hand.

But Ishtar hesitated. There was a part of her that ached to go with him. Ached to plunge about and to shout and sing, and be at one with everything in that wild world of his. But there was another part that was afraid. Confusedly she struggled with the urgings of both. Then the discipline of the most vital years of this life took command. Rules and regulations and time keeping and "you must" and "you must not" asserted their sway.

"I can't do that. It would be very naughty," she said.

The word rather puzzled Copper Top. There were things that were right and things that were wrong. There was the Law. But "naughty"? He did not understand. So he said, "Why?"

Ishtar did not quite know why, but after a moment she thought of a reason.

"It would frighten Grannie," she said. She was not quite sure that it would frighten Grannie, but she was quite sure that it would frighten her mother and Nana had they been there, and that they would be angry.

"Who is 'Grannie'?" asked Copper Top.

"Daddy's Mummy," answered Ishtar. "Come and see her. I think you'll like her," she added coaxingly, "I do."

"Is she like you?" asked Copper Top.

Ishtar bubbled over into laughter.

"You are funny," she said. "She's quite, quite old. But p'raps"—hopefully—"she was like me once."

During this conversation the Professor's whistle had

grown insistent and considerably nearer. He and Lady Condor had quarrelled violently over the Irish question of the moment, had made it up again, and Lady Condor was realising with some misgivings that Ishtar had disappeared. She had come with the Professor to search for the children. Mr. Fothersley remained seated under the pear tree. He frankly disliked rough walking, as he disliked picnics and meals out of doors and violent games and things of that order generally.

"Dear Arthur is letting himself get old," said Lady Condor as she set her dainty Paris-shod feet down bravely among the leaves and beech nuts on the rough forest track. They certainly looked incongruous enough there, as did her embroidered silken gown and her floating motor veil among the bushes. She always wore a motor veil when travelling in her bath chair, though from what connection of ideas no one knew.

"I do hope nothing has happened to the child," she said anxiously.

"Good Heavens! Why should anything happen?" asked the Professor, leading the way and removing stray brambles and sticks from the path as he went. He was in his shirt sleeves, for the morning was hot and the visit had taken him by surprise. "You and the child come up to the woods. They are worth coming to. Look at them. But instead of enjoying them, first you attack me with ridiculous theories as to how to manage Ireland, and then you imagine something has happened to the child who has had the good sense to go and look for herself."

He whistled again, and this time there was an answer. A moment later the two children came within sight, walking decorously hand in hand down the open glade in the sunshine.



"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lady Condor. She had her glasses on her nose to look for Ishtar so she could see distinctly.

"Well!" said the Professor harshly.

"He is . . ." Lady Condor paused. It was most remarkable, but words failed her. "He is like—I don't know what he is like, dear James, and yet I do—but whatever it is, he is a most beautiful child."

"Errmph!" grunted the Professor. There was a lump in his throat and the sunshine was all a-dazzle round the little slim figure and that dear bronze head.

Copper Top had stopped and was staring at the wondrous apparition advancing upon him. It was not a rude stare, but it was comprehensive. The Professor tugged nervously at the collar of his tieless shirt. Even his beard looked anxious. The first impression on Lady Condor's side was undoubtedly favourable. What would the boy's be? It seemed a terribly long time before Copper Top suddenly advanced again with that effortless movement of his and pulled up just in front of Lady Condor.

He saluted gravely. Then he shook hands with equal gravity. She had bunches of flowers all round her hat. Five different sorts, two that he did not know and three that he did. Her dress looked as if it were made of the same stuff as tulips. Her smile was like a rainbow. It had lots of colours in it and sunlight.

"How do you do?" he said. "It is a pleasant day. I like how you look."

"You darling," said Lady Condor.

Undoubtedly they were friends at first sight.

Lady Condor and Mr. Fothersley spoke French to each other nearly all the way home. Ishtar thought it was most mean of them. The visit she had looked

forward to so much had not been altogether a success. Worse still, she felt that she herself had not been a success. There was an uncomfortable sinking feeling in her inside when she thought of her last glimpse of the boy seen round the corner of the bath chair as it bore her away. A glimpse of a flying figure disappearing into the green depths with birds about a bronze head. Birds . . . they were better than gold wings. . . .

Grannie poured forth a veritable flood of curious sounds, out of which every now and then a word emerged which Ishtar recognised—"enfant" and "petit garçon." Uncle Arthur got in a few words sometimes which he seemed to produce by a mortal effort of a painful nature. He said more words that Ishtar knew than Grannie did.

Presently he stopped Rob and turned right round. He was very pink in the face, and he and Grannie both talked at once. Grannie was waving both her hands. It made Ishtar feel better. There was always a gay feeling about when Grannie talked French and waved her hands.

Then Uncle Arthur broke into English.

"The boy is nothing more or less than a gipsy foundling, Marion," he said. "I cannot conceive anything more undesirable than that you should take any action which will lead to his being looked upon as One of Us. James . . ."

"Oh James . . . !" began Lady Condor, her hands more than eloquent.

Really, thought Ishtar, they were silly. She could have told them all the time.

"Don't worry, Uncle Arthur," she said. "The boy's just the same's you or Daddy."

Lady Condor told Lord Condor all about it when she

got home. She always did this when he was there to tell. Sometimes he listened and sometimes he did not, but he was always sympathetic.

"There is no doubt that poor dear Arthur is allowing himself to grow old," she said. "His mind cannot adapt itself, you know. I don't think he has ever got over the shock of being mistaken by the New Mayor—at that Meeting you know—for the new profiteer man who has taken Mentmore Court. I think it really was that the poor man—the Mayor I mean—was so nervous he was not quite responsible, for no one could possibly think Arthur that sort of person. But it was a great shock to him, I know—he kept referring to it, and I don't think he has ever been quite the same since. I suppose as one grows older one does get a little peculiar. I hope I shall not, because . . ."

"Good Heavens!" interrupted Lord Condor, who had been hurriedly examining all the coins in his pockets, "I believe I gave Temple's groom a penny instead of half a crown."

Lady Condor went off into a fit of her delightful chuckles and tucked her arm through his.

"At any rate, my dear, we shall grow peculiar together," she said. "Let us go and look at those new Middle White Pigs."



## CHAPTER IX

“AND now, dear James, at last we are alone!”

Lady Condor rustled out of her drawing-room on to the noble terrace beneath the south wall of Mentmore Castle, settled herself into her own special chair in the sheltered corner, scattered various articles of apparel around her, and beamed.

The Professor grunted. He was in a bad temper. A whole week had passed since Lady Condor's visit to the Little House. When an urgent invitation had arrived asking him and the boy to lunch at the Castle he had certainly expected they would be the only guests. He had been prepared to have Lady Condor to himself, and listen to her considered opinion with regard to Copper Top's further education. Instead of which he had found the place full of People.

People! Marion knew that he detested them.

Copper Top had been whisked away to the nursery regions. The boy had probably slipped off and gone home long ago. The Professor wished he was there himself. On the other hand Copper Top might——

“Where is the boy, Marion?” he asked. “And what induced you to ask us when you had People?”

“I didn't,” answered Lady Condor, continuing to beam. “The Duke came to see Condor about reclaiming the waste land between the two estates. If they can't reclaim they talk of a Public Golf Course, for People, you

know." Her eyes twinkled. "And of course he stayed to lunch. And the Dymchurchs came quite unexpectedly, they always do. I think she finds it helpful when he is in a bad temper. And they brought Poppy Flower——"

"Brought who?"

"She sat on your right hand at lunch and——"

"The woman in beads, with a concertina on her head? Poppy Flower!"

The Professor glared at Lady Condor under his eyebrows, and Lady Condor chuckled.

"That is really her *nom de plume*, but she likes to be called by it. You must have heard of her books, James. She has written a great many. The last one was called 'The River of Blood.' Why, I heard her telling you about it at lunch. She said it had just gone into the tenth edition. And you said, 'Good God'!"

"Did I?" asked the Professor guiltily. "Well, you must be thankful it was nothing worse, Marion."

"I was!" said Lady Condor. "And now let us talk about— What was it you came to talk about? Oh yes—the boy! Arthur and I nearly quarrelled about him on the way home. Poor dear Arthur!—he is getting very left behind—it makes him a little tiresome, you know. His mind still moves in the age when his grandfather asked the family doctor and the family solicitor to dinner once a year to meet each other. So dull, poor dears. There seemed no possibility then, of course, that they would ever be asked to meet anyone else. I make no pretence, like poor old Lady Dowdeswell, to be a Democrat, or is it a Socialist, or are they the same? No one seems to know, do they? And how can you be a Democrat, or whatever it is, with a Rolls-Royce car and men-servants? But one has to recognise nowadays that even the solicitor's clerk or the doctor's drug boy

may be a future Prime Minister. It is like the Field-Marshal's baton in every knapsack, as Napoleon—or was it Wellington?—said."

"Umph!" grunted the Professor. "So Arthur does not think Copper Top a suitable companion for Ishtar."

"Well, dear James, perhaps it was a thing to consider, and you know dear Connie—but Ishtar settled the matter."

"Ah," murmured the Professor.

"We got so heated in our argument that Arthur forgot we were speaking in French. Fortunately not at a critical moment—no! And you know Ishtar always waits till he does that, just like dear Ricky used to do. Then she said, 'You needn't worry, Uncle Arthur. The boy's quite the same as you and Daddy.'"

"Bless the child," said the Professor.

"I do wonder what his parentage is," said Lady Condor thoughtfully.

"I don't see that it matters."

"Well, perhaps not. Indeed I am not sure that a little mystery is not rather attractive—so long as it remains a mystery. Still I do wonder if—but I promised never to mention that! The boy is undoubtedly gently born, I have no doubt of it, and that is the chief thing after all. But really, James, he cannot be allowed to grow up without mixing with his fellow-creatures. It is not fair on him. Something must be done!"

"I quite agree with you," said the Professor, and groaned. He thought of the female in beads. She had smelt of—what did she smell of? Some scent that reminded him of church. When he was a small boy. "Well, Marion, what do you suggest?"

"I have thought it all out" replied Lady Condor briskly. "To-day—it did amuse me to see you so



cross, James! And I had been working so hard really to think what was best. Indeed I dreamt last night that I was a butterfly, and Copper Top caught me and put me in a cage and fed me with nuts, and I was dreadfully distressed because I had nothing on, though why that should matter to a butterfly—but of course you did not know that. But where were we? Oh, yes. I have quite decided that the little man must begin by mixing more with ordinary human beings, and see something of the world as it is outside a wood. That is the first thing. Let us begin with that.”

The Professor agreed humbly.

“Nana’s rheumatism has been very troublesome lately,” Lady Condor went on with apparent irrelevance, scratching her nose thoughtfully with her pince-nez. “I persuaded her, or rather I persuaded Doctor Butterley, that she ought to go to Bath for a course of waters. She left yesterday. Yes. I hope to goodness she will not come back! She has grown so very like Li Hung Chang lately. You did not notice it? No. My private opinion is that dear Connie is afraid of her. It will be a relief. These old nurses, you know, can become terrible martinets.”

The Professor nodded with so much gravity that he might have been keenly interested in old nurses all his life.

“But children are queer things,” Lady Condor went on. “Generous things, the little dears. I am certain that old woman made Ishtar’s life a burden to her, yet she cried bitterly yesterday afternoon when she left. To-day she is a different child. The under nurse, a little French girl, is looking after her, and will let her do exactly as she likes, except when it really matters, you know.”

“Yes,” said the Professor patiently. He did not know

what she was driving at, but he knew that she usually arrived somewhere.

"Now I propose that Copper Top shall spend as much time down here as—well, as we can persuade him to," concluded Lady Condor, arriving, as she often did, suddenly. "Rose will keep an eye on them in case of accidents, otherwise they will do as they like. It will be good for both of them."

"It is very kind of you, Marion, very kind," responded the Professor warmly. "It takes a great load off my mind. When you know the boy better you will understand. At present he does not seem quite to belong to the human kingdom, and when I think of him caught up in the Machine as he's bound to be——"

Lady Condor's shrewd eyes were very kindly as she looked at him. Little memories flitted across her face and made it sweet.

"Ah, my dear, we all feel a bit like that about our babies. Parents—they get a lot of abuse—really, you know, from what I read nowadays, parents are the last people in the world who ought to have children! However, no doubt Providence knows best. Providence, of course——" Lady Condor paused and looked at the Professor thoughtfully. "But I wonder now why Providence dropped a stray baby in *your* path, James? The last person I should have selected myself. And yet it is quite wonderful how well you have brought the little man up."

"You really think so, Marion!" The Professor's expression was that of a dog receiving an unexpected bone.

"I do," said Lady Condor. "It is most amazing! But then, dear James, you always are so very unexpected, aren't you? That little life of the boy's, among the birds and animals, is quite beautiful, and he is beautiful too,

and so clean. I did not quite expect that—although of course there is Kate. But in any case one would have expected something more like Tarzan of the Apes—Condor will call him Tarzan, by the way! I do hope you won't mind. He is always so charmed with himself when he finds an appropriate nickname for anyone that I cannot stop him. But where were we? Oh—yes! Dear Connie insists on some lessons, though my feeling is that Ishtar would be better without them. However, there it is! Mademoiselle Buisson—you remember she was our French governess, and we have given her a little cottage in the village—she will teach them for two hours every morning, and I will take Copper Top into Fairbridge and show him the shops and things, and we will motor into Brighton or Eastbourne and show him the sea, and—really, James, I am quite looking forward to it!”

“It is very good of you, Marion,” repeated the Professor. “I leave everything to you and Ishtar.”

Whether Copper Top was prepared to be left in their hands was, he knew, another matter. However, the boy had agreed quite willingly to the present expedition, and apparently so far nothing disastrous had occurred. Of course he might have run away home long ago.

The Professor smoked one of Lord Condor's excellent cigars and listened to Lady Condor's chatter and restrained with difficulty his desire to propose a search for the children. He was getting a perfect old fool over the boy! Still, there would be no harm in——

But at this moment Lord Condor joined them and proposed a visit to the stables.

Copper Top was getting on, on the whole, remarkably well. Certainly he had had some anxious moments when Ishtar had first taken him in charge and led him across



the big, rather dark hall. Indeed, his feelings were akin to those with which Ishtar had made her way through the deep shadows of the wood. She recognised this, and felt a little glad. It seemed to bring the boy nearer to her.

He walked down the centre of the hall with dainty steps, his nostrils dilated, his eyes widely open. He glanced warily from side to side. There were strange things that looked like the shells of men, weirdly menacing. Pallid faces stared at him out of dark pictures. They had curiously shaped bodies attached to them. It was an ugly place, he thought. Even the shadows were not nice shadows; and there was such a curious smell. Then, suddenly, there glimmered on him a vision of dead babies covered with blood; of women's faces mad with anguish.

Copper Top fled.

An open door at the end of a long passage showed the flicker of green leaves in the sunshine, and he made for it like a homing pigeon. Beyond the door he found himself on a gravel pathway which led to more gravel pathways, primly straight across smooth green turf, and there were lots of queer-shaped dark green trees like no other trees he had ever seen.

He confronted Ishtar, who had followed him with a rapidity only second to his own. "Why do you have pictures of men killing things—killing babies?" he demanded.

"It is a very wonderful picture, hundreds of years old, about a story in the Bible," answered Ishtar, on the defensive. Then she added suddenly, "I hate it, too!"

"And why do you cut your trees into ugly shapes?" Copper Top went on. "They don't like it."

Ishtar stared at him. She knew trees cut like that were ever so valuable and wonderful. People who came to the

Castle always wanted to see them, and exclaimed at their beauty. They were "exquisite specimens" of some queer long word. She could not remember it.

She looked at them. "I don't think they *are* very pretty," she confessed, "but I know they are 'exquisite specimens.' *Very* exquisite," she added, seeing that Copper Top was not impressed.

"Let us go back to the forest," he said.

Ishtar's face fell. Her under-lip gave the little quiver which hurt him inside.

"But you've come to spend the day with me and it's time for dinner, and I want to show you my toys and Robert and the gold fish. And we can get to the school-room without going into the house again."

She caught hold of Copper Top's hand and he yielded. He could not bear to see her lip quiver. And he had never seen any gold fish. He would like to see them. Also he caught sight of Robert.

Robert was a brilliantly beautiful Macaw standing on a perch in the flood of sunshine outside the school-room window, and he and Copper Top literally flew into each other's arms. At the full length of his chain the great bird spread his wings around and over the boy's head. He bent his crest down and laid his fierce beak against the boy's cheek, clucking and chuckling. He said the one word he knew, his own name, over and over again in every possible intonation.

Copper Top danced with delight. He ran round the stand, dodging the great wings and fierce beak, laughing, laughing, until the air rang. He took Robert into his small arms and stroked his blue and yellow feathers while they talked together in bird joy-sounds. They were delighted with each other.

Ishtar watched them, swung between fear and interest.

She was afraid of Robert. Everyone was afraid of him, except Grannie.

"Stroke him," commanded Copper Top. "He won't hurt you."

And, greatly daring, Ishtar stroked him. His feathers felt good to her touch. It was the bravest thing she had ever done in her life. Robert had such a wicked eye, and his beak always reminded her of the curved swords in the Ali Baba pictures.

The little French maid appeared in the long window and said that dinner was ready.

"I stroked him, Rose! I stroked him my very own self!" Ishtar cried to her triumphantly, while Robert flapped his wings proudly and called after them in every dulcet wheedling note that had ever been addressed to him by terrified mortals.

At dinner Copper Top tried to remember everything the Professor had impressed upon him as they walked down to the Castle with regard to behaviour at meals when ladies were present. He stood beside his chair until Ishtar was seated. This pleased Ishtar. She disliked children who hurried into their seats and fixed their eyes on the food they liked best. Also it made her feel very grown up. But after that Copper Top forgot to remember. There was a thing called Shepherd's Pie for dinner, and he refused it, stating frankly that it had a nasty smell, and he carried his pudding out to share with Robert without even asking if he might get down. Ishtar was very glad that Nana was not there. She would have thought him a rude little boy and a bad example. And he never said his grace.

There was no coaxing him back into the school-room to look at the toys, and he was not interested in Croquet.

"Why should I want to hit the ball through the hoop?"



he asked. "And why should I want to do it better than you?"

Ishtar did not know, so she took him to feed the gold fish.

The garden was deliciously hot, and sweet with the scent of thousands of sun-steeped flowers. There were many Copper Top had never seen before. He flitted from one to another, singing with joy. He used no adjectives, he just sang. A great bed of heliotrope, gorgeously purple, an ecstasy of scent, had a whole song to itself. The butterflies came and fluttered round his shining head. They settled on him as though he, too, were a flower. When Ishtar stole close to him they settled on her. She saw their eyes, their long whiskers, their tiny tiny mouths, and the gold sheen on their wings. She was "heavenly happy." Her dream of the boy was really coming true. And the butterflies were not afraid of her; at least not when he was there.

Copper Top loved the gold fish, and the lily pond with the straight gleaming stone edges where they lived. Before the mingled glory of white water-lilies and the red-gold sheen of the darting fish he knelt in rapture, even song-silent. He longed to slip into the pond and swim in and out among the lovely lily stems in the clear cool water. He had promised the Professor not to take off his clothes, and a promise between them was a solemn undertaking, rarely exacted, and not to be lightly disregarded, but——

"Do you swim in here?" he asked.

Ishtar looked at him with rather horrified eyes. "Oh, no! One couldn't! And it is full of fish!"

Copper Top sighed. It would be most good. People were funny! But it was no use saying anything, so he only lay flat on his stomach with his face over the edge

of the pond, and held inviting hands out to the fish who came switching their shining tails and thrusting eager noses up to the surface. Ishtar lay beside him and watched him slip tempting fingers under the water for the fish to bite. She did not want to do that too, she did not think she would like the feel of fish, but she loved their wonderful colours, and the lily pond was somehow different to-day. It gave her a new feeling. And the lilies were so wonderfully white, and their insides like golden crowns.

"Do you think p'raps we've got gold crowns in our insides?" she asked. "Insides have such funny feels sometimes."

"It's when you shut things up in them, I 'spect," said Copper Top. "You're always shutting things up, aren't you? You like it."

Ishtar considered. "You have to, don't you. Would you like to see the glass houses?"

They did not sound to Copper Top so attractive as gold fish. He rather mistrusted houses. But perhaps glass houses were different, were what houses ought to be. This place had very interesting things in it, and perhaps——

His thought stopped suddenly. They had turned round a corner in the garden where the path ran along the top of a wall, a brick wall that dropped six feet to close-cropped meadows sweet with growing grass. And in the meadows were horses! Horses!

Copper Top gazed for a moment. Sheer ecstasy flashed in his eyes. They were bluer than anything Ishtar had ever seen. He shouted. It was like a chime of bells. Then he sprang clear into the air, landed light as a blown feather on the grass, and away till he vanished among moving manes and tails and hoofs.

Ishtar screamed to him to come back. These were the young horses, unbroken, dangerous. She had been strictly forbidden to go into that field. She called and called, helplessly. What were they doing to Copper Top? What were they doing? She made her way back to the house, moving blindly with outstretched hands. "Grannie!" she screamed. "Grannie!" and continued to scream.

Lady Condor was having a delightful nap in the shaded heat of the terrace. She woke with a start, conscious that someone was calling. Yes! Someone calling her—Grannie—someone screaming—someone afraid——

In her agitation, when this was fully borne in upon her, she actually gathered up all the impedimenta that, as usual, filled her lap. Clutching various things in both hands she hurried, as quickly as her bulk and her high heels would permit, in the direction of the screams. Anyone who looked more helpless to cope with an emergency it was impossible to imagine, but Lady Condor's appearance was a thing not to be reckoned upon. In spite of all her paraphernalia she travelled with such speed, collecting a stray gardener on her way, that she reached the corner round which lay the sunken wall at the same moment as Ishtar.

She clasped the little figure in her arms, dropping around it in a shower all the various articles to which she had so far clung firmly, and gasped. "Never mind, darling! What is it? It's quite all right. What is it?"

The gardener stood in the background and respectfully scratched his head.

"It's Copper Top!" sobbed Ishtar, bursting into tears. "He's all among the horses! I—I think they're k-killing him."



At this moment, mysteriously sprung from nowhere so it seemed, Lord Condor and the Professor appeared upon the scene. The former was, in spite of his size, a man of action. When he realised the situation he pulled up a stake from an adjacent delphinium bed, gave a brief order to the gardener to do the same, and let himself carefully but swiftly down the wall into the meadow. The Professor followed. He assured himself that no animal was likely to hurt Copper Top. It was not reasonably possible! And yet—— He looked at the toss of manes and tails, the swiftly moving hoofs, and his inside felt unpleasantly hollow. Had they trampled the boy to bits—savaged him——

Lady Condor continued to scream injunctions after them while in the same breath she did not cease to assure Ishtar that it was quite all right.

Then, when the situation was at its height, a small figure sprang above the medley of jostling horses. One of them broke away from the others and raced across the field. On its back, erect, singing, sat Copper Top.

He held a strand of the horse's mane twisted round his right hand, he swayed to its lithe movement, he bent forward and seemed to whisper in the beast's ear. It was evident that he had complete command over the flying creature. As one they leaped the hedge into the Park and disappeared.

The Professor mopped his forehead and gave thanks. Lord Condor looked at the Professor.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed.

"That boy will be the death of me," gasped Lady Condor, and sat down heavily on an iron garden seat that was accommodately at hand.

Ishtar stared after the flying horse with the tears still wet on her cheeks. The boy could ride! Ride better

even than Grandpa or Daddy or—or anybody she knew.

Copper Top was thinking of none of them. He shouted and sang while he swayed to every movement of the living swiftness that carried him. He was divinely happy. This fleet passage through the sweetness of cleft air, it was something at least of what he had dreamed among the tree-tops. Something of that rapid ease of movement which he knew had once been his. The rise and fall, the sway and urge, filled him with wild rapture. And the living thing that shared it, how he loved her! He stooped and nuzzled her outstretched satin-smooth neck, he whispered love words into her delicate pointed ear. They swept as one over the soft sweet turf. They leaped as one over hedge and ditch, leaving the earth far below their flying feet. And as they swept and soared he smelt and tasted the grass and the sunlight as never before. It was all one.

The little mare slackened her pace under his caresses and turned her beautiful head round. She nuzzled against Copper Top's bare knee, and her lips were of a softness far surpassing velvet. Her eyes were soft too, soft and brilliant at the same time. Something made Copper Top think of Ishtar.

Would she come too? There were more horses. He knew, now he thought about it, that she would love to come. Her fair little face would be looking sad because she was left behind.

He turned his new friend round, and they went back to the little group still on the path above the wall. Unsustained by the faith both the Professor and Ishtar had in Copper Top, Lord and Lady Condor were still suffering from fairly acute anxiety. The filly was unbroken. High-spirited and unmanageable even in skilled hands.

No doubt the boy was extraordinary with animals—still, anything might happen. And when he came cantering back safe and sound they were mightily relieved.

“A born horseman,” murmured Lord Condor, and the Professor smiled. He knew Copper Top was secure of a place in the affections of the great Condor Family, horsemen and horse-lovers to the backbone. He remembered a story of Lord Condor’s youth when a heart-rending description of the drowning Egyptians in the Red Sea had drawn from him the question, “Were the horses drowned too?” and the comment, “Then I think it was beastly of God.”

Copper Top pulled the little mare up below the wall with a workmanlike turn of his small knee. He looked at Lord Condor.

“What is her name?” he asked.

“Well, we haven’t given her one yet,” answered Lord Condor, now hugely amused. “She is the Emerald Filly. Find her a name, Tarzan.”

Copper Top looked him between the eyes. They were friends.

“She is Cloud of the Air, and she is Running Water,” he said.

“Running Water is good enough,” said Lord Condor, nodding gravely. “Who taught you to ride, Tarzan?”

Copper Top looked puzzled. “Can’t everybody?” he asked. “And my name is not Tarzan, but you may call me by it if you like.”

The other horses came running up. They jostled round Copper Top and Running Water, biting and whinnying. He turned to Ishtar.

“Will you come too?” he asked. “There are plenty to ride.”

For a brief second Ishtar longed and feared. She de-



sired, and shrank from her desire. She was a plucky little rider on her own pony, she went to the Meets, she loved riding. And to ride at full speed like that with Copper Top—over everything—in the teeth of the wind—wildly—madly—to the thud of flying hoofs. Oh, it would be wonderful! She would be brave—she would go——

“Certainly *not*, children!” cried Lady Condor. “Copper Top, you have nearly frightened me to death, and I have torn my frock and broken my glasses and called somebody a Fool, but I don’t know who, so I cannot apologise, and I am like the Queen who had no strength left in her. Let us go in and get some tea.”

Copper Top looked at the Professor despairingly. These other People—they were always afraid of something. And he had been so happy. He did not understand.

“I’m sorry, and I ’pologise,” he said. “And I would like to go home to tea.”

“Well, old chap,” said the Professor that evening, as they sat eating porridge and cream for supper under the oak tree, “what do you think of the Outside World now you’ve had a peep at it?”

Copper Top did not answer immediately, but the Professor was used to that, and waited. The boy looked at him with his head on one side, his lips parted, his eyes thoughtful. The expressions Outside and Inside always puzzled him a little. He loved Lady Condor, and he liked Lord Condor. His soft thick voice was good, it had a satisfying sound. He had seen some beautiful things. But Ishtar and Running Water ought to live in the forest.

He sighed a long sigh. “Why do they make such a fuss about everything?” he asked. “They must be tired. I’m tired.”

He stretched his arms above his head and yawned. "It's best up here. The horses would think so, too; they'd like the Uplands," he added, and curled himself up on the grass and went to sleep.

The Professor sat on smoking and thinking. On the whole the visit had been a success. The boy had not come across anything to upset him so much that he would not go to the Castle again, and he had made his first plunge into Society very creditably. That ride on an unbroken filly! The Professor chuckled. Condor's face! It had been as good as a play. Oh, the boy would hold his own right enough. "Why do they make so much fuss about everything?" It was quite a shrewd comment. Just what would strike a sensible person who lived a reasonable life.

He looked with kindly eyes, all fierceness gone from them, at the woodland world around him, and his heart went out to it. A light wind wandered over the garden and brought him the scent of the forest, and whispered softly among the oak leaves above his head. A missal thrush sang in the pear tree. He smiled contentedly, and finished his porridge and cream. Copper Top's summary remained in his mind and conjured up a vision of the well-appointed lunch table at the Castle. The glass and silver, the many courses, the baked meats and rich sauces. The brocaded curtains and the stamped leather and gilded walls, from which looked down the massively framed portraits of dead and gone Condors. And, the very centre-piece of it all, as it were, Poppy Flower, literally smacking her lips in ecstatic appreciation of the larded sweetbread with béchamêl sauce. A delectable dish to look at, and, the Professor had to own, a most delicate flavour, and so clean and dainty a name, why connect it with eating an integral part of the small woolly

lamb who had tumbled about on its insecure legs among the spring daisies with its patient, delighted mother?

But Copper Top would. Copper Top had a remarkable gift for getting to the real thing. It was awkward sometimes, very awkward! On the way home he had fumbled explaining the inwardness of that Shepherd's Pie. A mercy that he happened to be a vegetarian. Why was he a vegetarian? Of course! The little wife had been one. Yes, of course. And he had found it suited him, his brain had become more lucid, had worked better, and he had never even thought of going back to the flesh diet. Now it would repulse him. But he must explain things to the boy. Certainly he must. He re-lit his pipe, which had gone out, and sat on smoking and evolving the best intentions.

They are notoriously sleep-inducing efforts, and soon he was dozing peacefully, careless of investigating insects and of Wanky's fixed and anxious gaze. The dogs had naturally not been taken to the lunch party, but they were wholly unaccustomed to be left behind. Little Wolf had long ago gone off defiantly and happily, if a little resentfully, by himself. He was not so very far removed from his original ancestors. With Wanky it was different. He waited, with the infinite patience of the highly evolved dog. Presently the Professor began to snore. His head had fallen to that angle at which it is impossible not to snore. Finally he snored with such violence that it woke him up with a snort and a grunt.

He looked around him with mild bewilderment. He had been dreaming—yes—dreaming that he told Copper Top the fundamental inwardness of Shepherd's Pie—told it against his will, compelled by one of those malign influences that fortunately are only able to exercise their power in dreams.



And Copper Top had looked at him with the face of an accusing angel and had said, "I think you are a horrible race with disgusting habits, and I shall go home." And thereupon he had spread a pair of charming wings, made, so the Professor noted, out of Marion Condor's blue scarf bordered with pansies, and had flown away, right away, until he was only a minute speck upon the far sky-line above the hills.

The Professor looked hurriedly down. For a moment, while he blinked and shook his head, he felt quite relieved that the boy was still there, sound asleep.

He re-lit his pipe for the second time, and while the soothing fumes curled round him he decided that he would not tell the boy anything. Far better let things dawn upon him gradually. They would be less of a shock. He would just give him a general idea that out in the world things were different—he must be prepared.

Suddenly the boy sat up, wide awake upon the instant, and smiled at him.

The Professor smiled back. "Old chap," he said. "I want to talk to you. It's important, so listen carefully."

Copper Top assumed the attitude of a small heathen god, and nodded. Wanky got up and sat close beside him. He panted with his tongue hanging out in an affectionate manner, and thumped with his tail on the ground.

"I have arranged," began the Professor, "for you to go down to the Castle every day for the present, to learn French and—and other things—with Ishtar. Lady Condor will take you to see interesting places. To the towns and the sea—and so on. The World is a very big place, old chap, full of all sorts of people and things. You will find a lot in it that you don't like as well as a lot that you do. I don't approve of a lot that goes on, and I dare say you won't either. But one has to put up with

it. Errmph! Yes. There are such a da—dreadful number of People in the world, and you can't make them think. Think! Good Lord, you can't make them see or hear or understand! It's no good trying. I've tried. Don't you try. It's no good. They have the strength of numbers and inertia and the plausibility of greed and foolishness——”

The Professor had forgotten the intention with which he started out, which was to impress Copper Top with the fact that everybody had a right to their opinion about things, and was off tilting against his own especial windmill. Only Little Wolf's tumultuous and intimate return checked him.

“Yes, 'Dophin,” said Copper Top, with his usual cheerful interest in the Professor's invective. He was already quite prepared to find People committing all sorts of dreadful things, although those dreadful things only dwelt in his mind in the shape of strange words that he did not understand. Only that they meant something bad. He looked at the Professor over the ecstatically rejoicing little bundle of black fur in his arms.

“Why haven't we any horses, 'Dophin?” he asked.

“Horses!” echoed the Professor. The question seemed irrelevant to the matter in hand, still, why hadn't they any horses? He used to ride a lot at one time. Ride with Margot. It was rather wonderful riding, along the forest tracks. And with the boy——

“I don't know why we haven't any horses, old chap,” he said. “It is an oversight. We must get one or two.”

Copper Top had his own ways of saying “thank you.” On this occasion he went apparently quite mad. He and Little Wolf together. Just like two young puppies. Then he went up the oak tree and swung to and fro on

a topmost branch, singing to the sky while Little Wolf panted below.

His song came falling down through the still evening air like the song of a lark. The Professor, listening, smiled benignly, and re-lit his pipe for the third time.

What he paid Lord Condor the next morning for the little mare, Running Water, out of Emerald Agnes, by that celebrated hunter, Centaur, was nobody's business except his own.



## CHAPTER X

THE next morning Copper Top went off contentedly to the Castle. It was only by a great effort of self-control that the Professor refrained from going with him. He would have trusted him alone in the jungle or the desert with less misgivings than among human beings. Also he was becoming increasingly aware of what a heart-tearing business it was to thrust this lovely, unaccountable little life, which had dropped into his hands like a star from heaven, out into the world of men. But his conviction that it had got to be done remained unaltered. It had got to be done.

He wandered restlessly about, invading the kitchen at intervals to gather comfort from Mistress Jones, who had her faith to sustain her; her faith in the mysterious Beings whom she spoke of with bated breath as They. The Professor had no gods to have faith in. As Mistress Jones put it to herself compassionately, "his intellect not allowing of it."

Copper Top in the meantime was, on the whole, enjoying himself. He liked the little old French Mademoiselle, she had a voice like the big soft crimson roses that hung over the porch of the Little House, and he liked the sound of her words though he did not know their meaning. He could copy their sound "*à merveille*" she told him.

The children had lunch with Lord and Lady Condor,

who were alone that day, and at lunch Lord Condor explained to Copper Top the true inwardness of roast beef and veal cutlets.

"Fancy him not knowing!" he said to Lady Condor, over the big maiden-hair fern which stood in the middle of the table in a silver bowl.

Copper Top inquired into the matter much as he had done in the Professor's dream; he was not, however, upset in the way the Professor had imagined. He knew that some animals eat others. It was a nasty habit. But he did not expect man to be in any respect superior to the animals. Quite the reverse. Therefore he did not express feelings either of anger or astonishment, and his final question was asked in all good faith.

"Do you eat each other?"

There seemed to him no reason whatever for Lord Condor's collapse into a fit of laughter, but he had long ago learnt, even in his small experience, that People laughed when there was nothing to laugh at.

"Not in England," answered Lord Condor, when he had recovered. "I believe they do in some countries still. But it led to so much trouble that we gave it up some hundreds of years ago."

"Don't listen to him, darling," said Lady Condor. "The English were never cannibals, though they did paint themselves blue, and why blue I cannot think, it is such a cold colour, and no doubt they ate their meat raw, but not each other—no!"

Copper Top thought the red pieces everyone was eating looked very raw. He was glad when the plates were taken away; he did not like the smell. He longed to slip out over the window-sill like he did at home, but something held him. He felt as if the whole thing was a set performance which must be worked out to the very end.

Copper Top did not know the word Ceremonial, but if he had he would undoubtedly have applied it to the lunch. There was a rhythm about it all. Tall figures in queer dress came and went, under the direction of one, performing certain offices. They handed things in turn to everyone at given moments. At intervals everything was changed as if a new rite were about to commence. Each thing they ate was placed on differently sized plates. Everything they drank was poured into different shaped glasses. Some of them were very beautiful, and Copper Top liked the way the sunshine shone through them when it got the chance. He noticed that the different shapes were used for different drinks. He asked why, but no one seemed to know.

The last change of all was the most interesting. The figures took everything off the table very suddenly and only the lovely fern in the silver bowl came back; everything else was different. Instead of the flowers in glass vases there were dishes of fruit. Peaches and nectarines and grapes and raspberries. Copper Top loved them; they looked so beautiful. There was a shining glass bowl on everybody's plate with water in it, and on the water a flower floated. Copper Top had a round yellow flower in his bowl. It had been cut off its stalk close to the head. Copper Top never picked flowers, but he knew that everyone else did, even 'Dophin and Kathleen. This flower had been very badly picked. It did not like it.

There was no cloth on the table now, and Copper Top could see the reflection of his face in the polished surface, and the lovely grain of the wood. Of course it had been a tree once, full of sap and singing in the wind. Every spring it had put forth thousands of buds, every summer it had carried thousands of leaves, all going dipple dapple in the sunshine.



He was recalled to the Castle dining-room by Lady Condor's voice saying:

"Say your grace, darlings, and then you can get down."

The figures who had conducted the Ceremony had all gone. Everybody bent their heads reverently, and Ishtar folded her hands and said, "For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

She slipped down from her chair directly she had finished. Evidently this was the end of the performance. It had lasted for one hour and twenty minutes.

Copper Top looked at Lord Condor. "Do you do this every day?" he asked.

"What—have lunch?" returned Lord Condor. "Well, yes! Haven't you enjoyed it, Tarzan?"

"Not very much, thank you," said Copper Top. "May I go and see the horses?"

The head figure entered again softly. He carried coffee on a tray. One of the attendant figures walked behind with another tray. This had glass bottles on it with green and gold and crimson liquids in them, and tiny fairy glasses.

"We'll go round the stables together when I've had my coffee, Tarzan," answered Lord Condor. "I'd like to show you the horses myself."

"And Running Water?"

"And Running Water." Lord Condor nodded. "Go and feed the gold fish till I come. Ishtar knows where their cake is kept. Rum little beggar that," he added as the children vanished. "Only shows the difference environment makes!"

Lady Condor roused herself out of deep thought, but waited until the door closed behind the servants before she spoke.

"If you come to think of it," she said, "it is wonderful the amount of—of—well, you know—that is necessary to provide us with our meals, proper meals I mean of course. And yet what would one do without them? They are such a *passe temps*! Fancy having your Aunt Jane to stay without proper meals! There is positively nothing else to do with her on a wet day. I simply long for the sound of the gong. But I suppose if this scarcity of servants continues we shall have to do without them. Perhaps though they will last our time. But not dear Connie's I do not think. No. And I fear she will dislike it very much, poor dear." She paused on her way out of the room to stroke her husband's head. "You would have made a lovely monk, dear, you have such a perfect natural tonsure! One of those big jolly ones—monks, I mean, not tonsures—the ones they always paint drinking out of large jugs, you know. Be sure and send the children in at ten minutes to three. I am taking them in the car to Fairbridge."

"Tarzan will be much happier with the horses."

"But this is part of his education! James wants him to see the world."

Lord Condor raised an eyebrow.

"Fairbridge!"

"Well, you know what I mean. The poor child has never seen a street or a shop or a railway station or a train!"

Lady Condor billowed away on a note of exclamation. She was looking forward enormously to showing Copper Top all these things. The little fellow would be so delighted.

But the start was not altogether a success. Copper Top looked at the car and listened to the noise made by the engine with suspicion. He was only enticed to get

in by the assurance that it could run faster than a horse; also Ishtar, all in her best clothes to go out with Grannie, and looking like an apple blossom flower he thought, was already ensconced and distinctly superior.

For the first mile he terrified Lady Condor by examining, with a bird-like swiftness of movement that made it impossible always to seize and hold him, from various angles, as much of the car and its amazing power of movement as was possible for a passenger. Presently she realised that he had an equally bird-like perfection of poise and balance, and ceased to worry.

Down the long steep hill into Fairbridge that forty horse-power Daimler was allowed to do its best. Ishtar clapped her hands.

"Isn't it lovely?" she cried.

"It's lovely for the car," said Copper Top. "But it makes such a fuss about it. Just like People. So perhaps it doesn't enjoy it."

"But the car can't enjoy anyfin."

"Why can't it? It's the car that's going quick."

"But so are we."

Copper Top shook his head. "It's not the same thing as going yourself," he said patiently. It was funny, even Ishtar did not understand things as they really were. "We went faster than this," he added after a moment's thought, "but we didn't have to make a fuss to get along."

"Did you dream about it?" asked Ishtar. "I dream I'm flying sometimes. But I 'spose I have wings."

"We hadn't wings. We could just go, anywhere——" He stretched out his arms, and Lady Condor smiled indulgently. Children had such queer pretty fancies.

"Do people live in all these houses?" asked Copper



Top, looking about him with wide eyes. They were passing little cottages here and there, and now and then a farm house. He looked at them all with interest. Sometimes a man was working in the garden or a woman came out of the gate. There were children about. They looked different to Ishtar, and when they called out the words had a queer sound. They passed other motors, and carts drawn by big horses. Lots of things flashed by. There was no time to look at anything properly. Then there came lots of bigger houses, only not so big as the Castle, and then the houses were all in rows, and there were lots and lots of people, and motors and carts and horses, and dogs of all sorts, and he saw one cat but no birds, and everything looked dirty and untidy, and the whole place was making a noise. It had a sound of its own. Of course everything had. The sound of a town was a very disagreeable sound.

The motor pulled up at a place where the roads went different ways and there were houses everywhere jostling each other. Lady Condor pointed out the places called shops, where they sold this and that, but Copper Top was staring at the people as they passed to and fro. Anything alive always interested him more than inanimate things.

"Why do they all look cross, or as if they were sick or in a fuss?" he asked.

A woman with a shrill voice, projecting teeth, and a black spotted thing over her face had just seized upon Lady Condor and Ishtar, and was talking very hard and fast to them, so he got no answer. He continued to stare at the passers-by. These were People, of course. They were funny. Here were two all hunched up. Lots of them looked hunched up. There seemed no idea about their clothes. They were just heavy ugly things that

hung from them. He wondered why they wore such queer things on their heads, and why their feet were such a funny shape. They were crawling along very slowly and they looked cross. A man followed them with a large stomach and a purple red face. His mouth was moving as if he were eating, and he seemed very angry about something. Then there came two ladies. One of them reminded Copper Top of Robert. She had a big fierce nose and a very high bare-looking forehead, and a queer shaped thing on her head with a big feather sticking up just like Robert's crest. She was saying, "My dear, the Working Classes of this country are rotten—rotten—that's what they are!" She seemed very annoyed about it.

Two children passed, eating sweets; they were pretty children, and Copper Top smiled when he caught their eyes. But they looked away at once, and he felt as if he had done something wrong.

Then a girl came talking to a boy. She looked as if she had been crying. She talked very fast. "Out you go," said she, "out you go, you lazy, dirty, impertinent slut!"

The high nasal wail passed away down the street, and Lady Condor's cheerful voice said, "Now, darlings, we will walk up Joynson Street and buy some sweets at Ronceaux's."

Her radiant presence was balm to Copper Top's soul. He even permitted her to hold his hand. Joynson Street was just round the corner. He did not dislike it so much. It was a very broad street and there were shops only on one side with trees in front of them. On the other side there were gardens full of bright-coloured flowers. And there were not so many People. The sweet shop was nicer than the other shops too, and the

sweets were good. Lady Condor told them to eat as many as they liked, and she bought several big boxes full of them, all arranged in neat rows. Everyone in the shop seemed pleased to see her, and there was a girl behind the counter with dark hair and a face like a pansy, who smiled at Copper Top over the sweets. She looked as if she were enjoying herself. She had a lovely secret hidden behind her eyes. Copper Top smiled back.

"Where do you come from, dear?" she said, quite low.

"Out of the forest," he told her, and she nodded as if that were a good thing.

"Why do you live in a town?" he asked.

"I'm not going to much longer," she whispered.

"I'm going to live by the sea." And he knew that was part of the secret.

"I'm going to see the sea one day," he whispered back.

She was just like a rose-coloured pansy.

"Now," said Lady Condor, while the pansy girl handed the parcels to the chauffeur, "we will walk up to the top of the street, because these are the best shops. Do not stare at people too much, darling, because it is not polite."

Copper Top did his best, and speedily became transfixed before a big, black, dirty-looking building with a square, squat tower brooding over it. Out of the tower came at regular intervals a melancholy cracked sound. A lot of People, very queer shaped people Copper Top thought, with funny feet, were going in at the open doors. It looked quite black inside. Darkness Copper Top did not mind, it was never black, and it was full of the voices of the winds and the trees and the grasses. But he shrank from this.

"Is it a prison?" he whispered.

"No, dear," said Lady Condor, almost shocked. "It is a Church."



"A Church?" Copper Top was frankly puzzled.

Had James never—— "Yes, darling. Where you go to pray to——" Lady Condor stopped. It certainly was a very ugly old building, and terribly grimy, and the old ladies—poor dears—— She caught sight of a large placard on the railings. "Of course!" she exclaimed. "It is a Conference of some sort that is going on. And that is Archdeacon Pinniger."

The Archdeacon came across the street with outstretched hands. The boom of his welcome preceded him.

"Dear Lady Condor, this is indeed a charming surprise. So you are really back again. And I need not ask how you are!" He encased one of her little tightly white-gloved hands in both his own and shook it up and down. "You look simply splendid."

They talked both at once after that, while the chauffeur picked up Lady Condor's gold bag and a stray scarf. Presently the Archdeacon noticed the children, and, releasing Lady Condor, bowed over Ishtar's small hand, extended with dignity and a determination not to be kissed. Then he looked at Copper Top.

"Why, this is Professor Godolphin's little protégé, is it not?" he asked. "I have been meaning to call there, but time is one of my difficulties, you know." He beamed expansively. "Still on my last visit"—he turned to beam on Copper Top—"I gathered the Catechism—ha-ha—was getting on satisfactorily."

Copper Top had not the faintest idea of what he meant, but he was deeply interested in the Archdeacon's remarkable resemblance to a raven, about the figure, especially the back view, so he did not give the Professor away.

The melancholy bell stopped clanging, the Archdeacon hurried away, and Lady Condor continued her progres-

sion along Joynson Street, pointing out various objects which she thought would interest Copper Top. His mind, however, continued to occupy itself principally with the passers-by. People were the oddest things he had ever seen. Certainly he had not expected very much. But he had had no idea of how funny they were. If they had only been enjoying themselves they would have made him laugh. As it was they made him feel uncomfortable inside, all except the pansy girl, and a boy in shirt sleeves playing with a puppy. Their faces shone among the others. There was light behind them.

"Why does everybody look cross or sick or all fussy?" he asked once more.

"Do they? I don't know," answered Lady Condor vaguely pulled up in an attempt to explain what a Town Hall was. "Don't stop there, darling. Come past quickly, that is not a nice shop to look at."

Copper Top had stopped in front of a butcher's shop hung with the usual gruesome array. His eyes were wide with apprehension, his face grew white under its golden tan, but he stood his ground and did not budge.

Ishtar tugged at his sleeve. "Do come away," she whispered. "It is horrid. I never look "

"It really ought not to be allowed, darlings," explained Lady Condor. "Even the Town Council must see how very unsanitary it is, and what is the good of so much fuss over microbes and germs when we expose our food to the dust and dirt of the streets. It is quite enough to drive people to vegetarianism! But no one *does* anything. Now that, of course, is what a Town Hall is really for, to attend to things of that sort. I could not quite place it just now——"

"They are cows' and sheep's bodies," said Copper Top

slowly, realisation in full beginning to dawn upon him. "Wiv their heads cut off and their skins gone——"

He looked at Lady Condor. She was oddly incongruous in front of the butcher's shop, clutching Copper Top with one hand and holding a scrap of a handkerchief to her nose with the other. Her many coloured raiment, her rose-decked hat, the fragrance of violets that came from her, her little dainty feet among the sawdust which had escaped from the floor of the shop on to the pavement, Copper Top felt the incongruity, though he could not have explained his feelings.

"Come away at once," she said in a voice of authority, moving her shuddering gaze from the bloody artery of a headless trunk.

"Why do you make beautiful things into that?" asked Copper Top, slipping with ease from her grasp, but yielding to her evident desire to get away. "I wonder if they were brown cows, the sort I like to look at in the sun, standing in the long grass. Long grass feels good. And there was a thing that had been a lamb there. They come in the spring when the daisies come. Why do you turn them into——"

"It's for food, darling," interrupted Lady Condor, hurrying him along the pavement towards the car. "You see all these people must be fed—you understand that, don't you? And you don't call meat cow and sheep, you must call it beef and mutton—it makes a difference somehow—though why it should—— Thank you, Kirby. Yes, we will go home now—and where are my glasses? I had them just now—in Ronceaux's. Oh, you have them! That is all right then. Quick, dears, jump in!"

Copper Top's eyes were fixed on a string of cabs further along the road, by the railway station, and she felt she could bear no more at the moment. Fortunately



Copper Top was feeling much the same. He jumped into the car with a feeling of escape. The whole of him cried out for the forest, for the Green World, for the Big and Little Winds. The Winds down here were sad like everything else. They were stained.

He gave up the effort to understand. The car carried them swiftly. There was the stile that led to the little pathway.

"May I get out here and walk home?" he asked, on tiptoe in an instant. "I do want dreadfully to stretch my two legs."

"Yes, darling, if you would rather," said Lady Condor, pulling the check string.

Ishtar longed to go with him. Now Copper Top had said it, her legs wanted stretching very badly too. But she settled herself back in her seat with a sigh. It was no good asking for the impossible.

Copper Top did not stop to say good-bye, or thank you, though this had been impressed upon him by the Professor. His Green World called, as surely it had never called before. The leaves beckoned, birds were singing. He was gone like another bird, swift and glancing, and in a moment he was a little quick shadow flitting among the trees.

The boy stopped in the same clearing where the Professor had stood on the day when he found Copper Top, and with something, a hundredfold intensified, of the same relief.

There was a large and comely Mother Rabbit sitting up on her hind legs washing her face and twitching her long nose. She was most happy and satisfied. The birds came flying to his singing, the squirrels played above his head. There were two field mice making a nest. The insects hummed in the grasses about his feet. They were

all most happy and satisfied. Copper Top sang and sang as he fled along the sun-washed glades, and flicked like a flash of sunshine in and out among the tall tree trunks. Wanky and Little Wolf and his pigeon met him on the upward path. King Edward was waiting at the meadow gate to poke a friendly nose under his arm. The Jersey cows were nibbling the sweet grass and flicking the flies away with their black silken tails. They were all most happy and satisfied.

He stopped on his way and ran across the meadow to look into the cows' gentle eyes and stroke their sides with his little fine fingers. 'Dophin would always take care of them.

'Dophin! He would sing praises for 'Dophin!

He popped his shining head into the study window, singing praises.

The Professor was writing at his desk. His hair stuck up and stuck out. He clenched his left hand round his beard, distorting it to an acute angle.

By midday his restlessness had become something to be dealt with firmly. "Something must be done," he said. "I am becoming a perfect old woman over the boy. I will begin my new book."

So he had begun, and because he was a writer by nature as well as by profession, soon his theme gripped him. He neglected his lunch. The afternoon went by as no time at all. What was that noise—a pleasant noise?

. . . .

He looked up and shaded his eyes with his hand, and blinked. The late afternoon sunshine was pouring in at the window. It circled a dear bronze head. God bless the boy. He was back.

Copper Top slipped over the window-sill and danced round him and his table like a bit of the wind incarnate.

So swiftly he went, so lightly. And as he danced he sang. Then he stopped quite suddenly and looked gravely from under his wide brows at the Professor.

"I sing praises for you, 'Dophin," he said. "You are quite right every way."

The Professor did not know what he meant, but it seemed entirely satisfactory. They went out and had tea together in cheerful contentment under the oak tree. There were green figs for tea, and honey, and wild strawberries with cream.

"The only thing that really worries me," Lady Condor was saying at that moment to Lord Condor, after she had given him an account of the afternoon's adventures, "the only thing that really worries me is that I fear James is bringing the boy up as—what is the word I want—not a Heathen, because of course they are black—but the people without any religious belief whatever—although he was certainly anxious about whether he had ever been christened——"

"James is a Heathen himself," said Lord Condor, who had just discovered he was pouring the milk into the tea-pot under the mistaken impression that it was hot water. When he had got over the shock of the discovery, he added, "Quite a good one though."

"Agnostic!" exclaimed Lady Condor. "No; Atheist! That is the word I want. Not Heathen—Heathens, of course, are black——"

"Heathens worship different gods to ourselves. They are not always black." Lord Condor slipped the information in sideways as it were. "I am afraid, my dear, I have poured milk into the pot instead of water."

The expedition to Brighton was more successful. Lady Condor took the little French governess with them, partly out of kindness, partly for moral support in case of emer-



gency. The children sat in front beside the chauffeur. By this time Lady Condor had realised that Copper Top was extraordinarily capable of taking care of himself, also that he had realised that Ishtar was not. Day by day their friendship had grown. Ishtar had almost entirely lost the listless air and little touch of priggishness that had worried Lady Condor. She sang about the place; she ran; she even, greatly daring, used the school-boy words she had heard her brothers use and told Copper Top what they meant. Lady Condor chuckled guiltily. Poor dear Connie!

Copper Top was used to the car now, and a motor drive with him was to Ishtar an experience. She saw the swiftly moving world with new eyes. Every fresh unfolding of the landscape was an event. Everything was living and had its own purpose. Hill and valley and tree, each assumed an individuality not less interesting than that of the more animated creatures. One and all Copper Top greeted them as brothers. When she was with him the World—not people—the World became absorbing.

She had been to Brighton many times before, through the woods, over the hills, down into Lewes. And many a time, beyond the old town, she had seen the great Downs that guard the sea rise mysterious in the sunshine, and thought just nothing about them at all. They were the Downs, and beyond was Brighton and the sea. To-day when they swept into view Copper Top's voice stopped on a sudden note. He stood up in the car, held out his arms, and shouted. It was as if he called, "Greeting, Brothers!"

It was a day for great events. The sun was shining gloriously. There was no wind at all. The soft hills curved and sank and soared up the vast blue horizon, full of warmth and silence and an immense happy peace.

"It would be most good to fly among them," said Copper Top, and sighed.

"If we only had my dream wings."

"You don't want wings. Those are for birds. You just go where you want. It is something inside. I could once. We lived up there as well as down here—only there was no up and down——" He frowned. "I can't remember. Only it was most good."

"It must have been dreams."

"I *dream* it sometimes now, and I wake up and I am in this. But once it was all the time."

A turn in the road swept the Downs behind them, and suddenly and hideously in their place lay tier after tier of grey slate roofs. The car dipped down amongst them into narrow streets shut in by grimy little houses, one after the other on each side all exactly alike. Copper Top gave a queer little gasp as if he had been plunged into ice cold water. Out of that great cheerful sunbathed space—into this——

"Why do People make such dreadful places, and who lives in them?" he asked.

"What's wrong with them, Master James?" asked the chauffeur. He and Copper Top had made friends over the inside of the car. "They're tidy little homes for a man and his family."

"You—you wouldn't dislike to live here, Kirby?"

"No," said Kirby. "One of these houses would suit me right enough. It depends what you're used to. I used to live in Brighton when I was a boy. Plenty of life about, and the sea if you want it."

Copper Top looked round. Plenty of "life." He didn't understand. There was not a single thing growing anywhere, and no birds. One or two stray cats and dogs, and he caught sight of a wasp on a window-pane.

There were some People, but they never seemed very alive. The sunlight even was dull and tired. It had so little that was alive to shine on.

Then, while he puzzled, someone said suddenly, "The sea!" and it flashed up, not only before his eyes, but into his conscious memory. He knew it. He loved it. It was part of the great Alive. He greeted it with a shout.

"Hush!" whispered Ishtar. "Everyone will hear you."

People walking on the front had heard. They stared at the little erect figure standing up in the front of the car. It made them smile. People looked happy here, he thought. They were enjoying themselves.

The car stopped and he turned to Lady Condor a little eager, flushed face. "May I go into the sea now?" he asked. "It will be most good to go into. Oh, there are birds too! Oh, look!"

He was out of the car before she could answer, had crossed the Parade, and dropped six feet over the railing to the shingle below, like a flash of light.

"Take off your suit first," Lady Condor called after him, preparing to follow by the nearest steps. "He has some little bathing drawers underneath. I sent word to Kate," she informed her companions. "And he can swim like a fish, I know, so we need not be anxious. We will go and watch him. Though the shingle is most dreadfully trying to one's feet. There, he has left his suit just where it will get wet!"

Copper Top fled, a little shining figure, straight into the dazzling surf, and as he fled he sang. The white horses came riding, the white sea birds came flying, to greet him. The great spaces of sea and sun took him to themselves. He lay among the sun flecks and felt beneath him the urge and sway of the water. The birds brooded around him, calling softly. He dived down,



down into the life-giving freshness, and looking up saw its blue-green, translucent vesture. He came up shouting. It seemed he called to freedom and the great spaces. He swam away up the broad sun track out to the open sea. The birds followed him.

"I suppose he is quite safe," said Lady Condor, a little anxiously. She stood on the edge of the incoming tide holding her prince-nez on her nose with one hand and endeavouring to control her scarf and veil with the other. "Cousin James said he was like a fish in the water, didn't he?"

"I think it is a shame!" cried Ishtar, and burst into tears.

"Darling! What is the matter?"

"Why can't I do that?" sobbed the child passionately. "Why can't all of us? Why's we brought up to be 'fraid of evvyfing, and why's evvyfing 'fraid of us? I call it perfectly beastly, that's what I call it."

She sat down and wept on the shingle, and Lady Condor's scarf floated out to sea and she lost her glasses irrevocably among the stones while she vainly attempted to comfort her.

"There, my little love, my darling. You shall learn to swim and then we will come again."

But Ishtar refused to be comforted.

"It wouldn't be any good. I'd be 'fraid. And you and Mummy and Nana, you'd all be 'fraid."

She sobbed inconsolably.

Little Mademoiselle watched the tiny speck among the sea birds now far out to sea. She had spent her life, ever since she had been eighteen, teaching children to speak French and trying to live on the proceeds. She was now sixty-five.

"Mais la petite a raison," she murmured.

## CHAPTER XI

GRADUALLY, and without much notice being taken of it, the children began to spend more and more time in the forest and to be less and less at the Castle. Every morning Copper Top would come flying in with the sun in his eyes and the wind in his hair. He would patter French, which he had learnt with amazing rapidity, with Mademoiselle, would listen with rapt delight while she recited poetry in that rich and eloquent language, and read, alternately with Ishtar, extracts from "*Les Malheurs de Sophie*," or from "*Les Mémoires d'un Ane*." Every day before he started he faithfully promised the Professor he would do all these things. After the lessons he ate cake and fruit in the garden, with Robert and a little crowd of humbler birds. Little Wolf preferred the "proper" dinner which Lady Condor had given particular orders should be "properly" served and eaten in the schoolroom. Ishtar obeyed all commands of Grannie's with almost religious fervour. It was a sort of thank-offering for the many usually forbidden joys that now were hers.

After dinner came the glorious moment when the groom brought round Ishtar's pony, and the whole party started for the Little House. The pony was white and her name was Snowball, but everybody called her Jane, and she answered best to queer noises produced by the groom, which Ishtar endeavoured to imitate.

They started with the utmost decorum, with the exception of Little Wolf, who shrieked madly at Jane's

heels or in front of her nose, while Robert screamed after them from his perch in every variety of abusive sound.

Once out of sight of the Castle windows affairs moved more rapidly. Jane trotted her very fastest, she knew she had to, until they were safely in the forest. Up to that moment anything might happen. A voice calling behind them—some devastating order from the Powers that ruled—shattering a whole world of promise, blotting out gay visions of delight.

Copper Top and Little Wolf ran beside her, the one not more lightly or more easily than the other. Rose ran behind, panting but happy. She was only a girl. She loved these expeditions. Although she was a "French" maid, and had brought wonderful credentials from Paris to that effect, she came from Belgium. The forest reminded her of her own great woods near Brussels. Shakespeare's Forest, where Jaques was "melancholy for pleasure." Rose felt like that too among the trees. She was still sad, but it was a pleasant sadness. The cool green shadows, the whispering leaves, the silver branches, they were none of them strangers. They spoke just the same language as her own did. They were all friends. She loved the Little House too, and Kathleen's kitchen, and the wide hearth where they sat and knitted together and told each other stories of their fathers and mothers and the days when they had been children.

So it came about that for one glorious month, when the work of earth, rain and sun was at its height, and the whole world ripened to harvest, Ishtar wandered free as a cloud day by day with the boy in the forest. Sometimes they rode together, sometimes they walked and ran and Running Water and Jane followed. Sometimes they lay among the soft warm grasses or paddled in the little streams. Soon there was no lovely secret



place in the whole forest that she did not know. The birds and squirrels and rabbits became less afraid of her. They would never let her touch them, but if she kept very very still the bolder ones would come to Copper Top while she was beside him. The deer made friends with her, and the pigeon. She was "heavenly happy." The boy taught her to lie close to the Earth and hear its heart beating, to hold her ear against it and listen to the fairy looms weaving its glorious garments. He taught her to bury her face among the long rushes that grew in the marsh land and hear their whispering song. He showed her the homes of many of the creatures, he told her what they thought about, what they were saying to each other. All their little secrets, all their little joys and anxieties, Copper Top knew them all. Gradually she learnt to climb the trees, though never could she reach their wondrous tops. But she climbed high enough to hear some of the songs the winds sang in them. The trees and the streams, the winds and the clouds, assumed individuality. She found names for the woods which made Copper Top laugh, but she knew he liked them. Many young oak trees with their trunks covered with grey lichen made a Mystery Wood. Larch trees made a Wood of Golden Veils. Red-boled fir trees made a Praying Wood. And the big Beech Grove was the Wood of Whispers. The Pear Tree in the garden she called the Singing Tree because there was always a bird singing out of its heart. The world was a most wonderful place. All fairyland and full of fairies. The flowers were fairies, and the little gold midges in the sun, and the water-spray dancing, mazy-white; myriads of fairies. Sometimes Copper Top told her of things he saw that she could not see—beings. She thought he was just making up stories for fun then. Soon he did not talk of these any more.

Ishtar went home in time for bed, but she did not go to bed. She went up to Grannie's room and told all her news and watched Grannie dress for dinner. This was a most interesting Ceremonial. Ishtar generally arrived about the moment when Grannie emerged from her bathroom radiant in floating draperies and bringing with her all the scents of Araby. She generally lost one or both of her shoes as she came, because though they had roses on the toes they had nothing behind to keep the heels on. Ishtar loved to pick them up and put them on for her. Even Cinderella, she thought, could not have had prettier feet than Grannie. Then came the thrilling moment when the maid dropped some rainbow-hued frock over Grannie's head. After that, while the frock was fastened up, Ishtar explored Grannie's wonderful jewel cabinet, and handed her chains and bracelets. Sometimes Grannie allowed her to choose which she should wear. Sometimes the treat was to fasten them on. Then Grannie gave a final little pouf of the powder puff to the tip of her nose and the back of each hand and was really finished, and Ishtar gazed at her with devout admiration and said, "You look lovely, Grannie, dear!" And so she did.

After that Ishtar was really sleepy and ready for bed. The moving dusk was slipping over everything. The star that looked in at the nursery window, from above the tallest tree, was getting very bright. There was an angel in the heart of every star, and when the angel sang the star shone.

Then everything altered, quite suddenly, as it does. Mademoiselle went away for her holiday so the lessons stopped, and Ishtar's father and mother and her two brothers came to the Castle on a visit, and a distant cousin, Don MacClean.

Don MacClean was also the captain of the cricket

eleven at John and Richard's school, and therefore a very important person indeed, to be treated with a respect bordering on awe. Ishtar followed her brothers' example. Also, apart from his god-like attributes as captain of the eleven, she liked Don MacClean.

He was indeed the "fine fleur," of everything she had been brought up to admire. He fulfilled the ideals of her race. Tall and well built, with the cheerful serenity that belongs to perfect physical health, he was entirely and commendably normal in his outlook on life and things in general, and already, at twelve years old a good rider to hounds and quite a fair shot. Without being clever he had the faculty of rising to the top of any difficult situation when necessary and staying there. Ishtar always had the comfortable feeling that she was quite safe when Don was about. Also, in spite of the halo which surrounded him, Don was to her a patient and willing slave. Yes, she liked him. She liked him quite as much as she liked Copper Top. Indeed he consoled her for the fact that with the arrival of her mother and the departure of Mademoiselle Copper Top's daily morning visit to the Castle ceased and her afternoon visit to the forest with it.

Don was always ready to have her for his partner at tennis against John and Richard, and to take her with them fishing or boating or riding. At first Lady Hawkhurst had demurred, but Lord Hawkhurst had come to the rescue. "Let her go," he said. "She will be all right with Don."

There was excellent pike and jack fishing to be had in the Castle ponds, and very fair fly fishing in the streams that flowed through them, if you were content with a quarter or half-pound trout. Sometimes Ishtar fished out of the punt with the boys. She loved the excitement when a fish was hooked and ran away with the line and



fought for his life, and finally, unless they were unlucky enough to lose him, came shining and twisting and twirling out of the water. But she hated it when they took the hook out of his mouth, and looked the other way shuddering. Also she could never steel her heart to put the worm on her own hook.

John and Richard laughed at her, quite kindly, for she was only a kid, and a girl at that.

"Shut up," Don would say, and put the wriggling worm on for her with his neat strong fingers. "I've known plenty of men who didn't like this job. A girl isn't much good if she doesn't mind hurting things."

Sometimes, when she got tired of fishing, Don would take her in the Canadian canoe and they would paddle about among the Water-lilies and the Bulrushes. Ishtar would pull the great beautiful flowers up and up by their long fat stalks until they broke and Don would cut the rushes for her with his knife. As often as not they forgot to take them home, but it was fun picking flowers.

Sometimes he would paddle her a long way down the little stream. It was so narrow that Ishtar could pick off the tops of the soft white river grasses and the rose willow-herb blossoms as she passed, and drop them into the stream and watch them float.

Copper Top did not like her picking flowers. It was silly of him really, because they were there to be picked. She asked Don, and he said of course they were. She told Don about Copper Top and a lot of the things Copper Top told her about the animals and birds, and Don was very interested indeed. Don knew a lot about birds too. He was making a collection of stuffed birds up in his own home in Scotland.

"Wouldn't you like better to have them all play with you alive?" Ishtar asked him.

"Yes, but I can't, you see, not like this chap can," said Don.

"I do wonder why they come to Copper Top," sighed Ishtar.

"So do I. I suppose he's got some way with him, like some fellows have with bees, you know. I wouldn't catch hold of that grass, Izzy, it might cut your fingers."

They were in the canoe on their way to the Mill, which was as far as you could go without carrying the canoe a little way over the road. Don had promised to carry it over one day and take her on the river beyond. Ishtar liked these expeditions best of them all. She liked the look of Don as he sat facing her at the other end of the canoe and paddled with strong, skilful strokes. She liked him with his coat off and his shirt sleeves rolled up and the sun shining on his sunburnt face and his smooth fair head.

"I think you look like a backwoodsman," she said, and she would lie happily watching him and weaving wonderful romances. Sometimes he had just rescued her from a tribe of Red Indians, and they were speeding to safety far, far away through the jungle. Or perhaps it was from a Magic Tower where she had been imprisoned for hundreds and hundreds of years by a cruel Ogre. But she did not tell Don of these stories which she made up. She did not quite know why. Don himself was not given to romance, but he undoubtedly derived considerable pleasure from Ishtar's society, to the continual astonishment of her brothers. Ishtar was a very nice kid; they were, in their own way, devoted to her, but that Don MacClean should care to spend his time taking her out in a canoe puzzled them considerably. There were such a lot of things one would have thought he would have

preferred, even if he were tired of fishing. Ferreting rabbits and rat hunting. There were also two promising young fox-terriers to be instructed in cat chasing. They mourned together in secret, being far too loyal to comment on Don's extraordinary behaviour to anyone else. An effort to suborn Ishtar, under an oath of secrecy, to pretend to an interest in manly pursuits, failed.

"I do want to do what you ask me," she wailed. "But the look of rats and ferrets makes me feel all sick inside, and I won't see a cat killed."

Still she was not altogether devoid of the sporting spirit of her race; when the First of September came and the guns were starting directly after an early breakfast, she longed to go with them. Her mother and grandmother would meet them for lunch later on. No doubt they would take her too. But Ishtar wanted to start off in the midst of the bustle and excitement of men and dogs while the mists still lay white on the low land and the dew-drops sparkled on every blade and twig. She wanted to walk beside Don, who looked ever so nice in his neat tweed suit and gaiters, with his cartridge bag slung by a strap across his back and his gun over his shoulder. Her brothers were both in close attendance on their father, carrying his cartridges with due importance, while Lord Condor's thick soft voice could be heard at intervals, above the babble of voices and the yapping of eager dogs, saying:

"Now don't let us have anything going wrong on the First."

Lady Condor stood on the top of the steps framed in the great doorway. Her hat and veils were of their usual brilliance, but as a concession to the First she had arrayed herself in a tweed coat and skirt and carried an ebony and silver walking stick with which she emphasised



the various instructions that she issued impartially to everybody.

Motor-cars and dog-carts kept driving up and discharging men, dogs and guns and shooting paraphernalia of all sorts over the wide gravel sweep.

Lady Condor held a reception of undoubted success in the portico. Lady Hawkhurst moved about holding Ishtar by the hand. She was pleasantly conscious of the perfect picture they made.

"What a wonderful morning!" "But it will be very hot later on." "We are joining you for lunch." "No, Major Johnstone, I am sure *the* Irish Stew has not been forgotten!" "The birds will be a bit wild." "Very forward, of course. Such a fine season." "Plenty of 'em though, that's the great thing."

Ishtar shook hands politely with all the men who came up to speak to her mother. They discussed her height, age, personal appearance, and resemblance to some one of her relations. Grown up People always did that. It was one of their odious ways of making themselves pleasant.

A girl who looked about two years older than Ishtar had arrived in one of the cars. She had curly red hair and blue eyes with white eyelashes, and thick legs and very grown up manners. She seemed to know Don quite well, and announced her intention of walking with him and carrying his cartridges. Ishtar hated her. She was glad when he refused to part with his cartridges, and that before they started he came across the drive and said in a little lordly way he had sometimes:

"I'm glad you're not coming, Izzy. A day like this I couldn't look after you very well."

It did not console Ishtar in the least for not going. But it certainly consoled her for the lively presence of the red-haired girl.

"Do you want to come?" asked Don.

Ishtar nodded, with that little quiver of her under-lip. "I'd just love to."

Don looked doubtful. "It's jolly heavy going, you know, and it will be hot later."

"I wouldn't mind a bit. But it's no good. Mummy won't let me."

"Well, I think she's right, you know. I'll take you out on an off-day," said Don comfortingly, and still in that little lordly way. Ishtar was not at all sure that she liked it.

"No, thank you very much, Don, I don't think I should care about that."

Ishtar was always polite even when she snubbed anybody. She left Don not quite sure whether he had been snubbed or not, and walked with a very dignified small back up the steps to join her grandmother. She did not fail to notice, however, that the red-haired girl walked with one of the men, and Don went his way alone.

It would not be correct to say that the possibility of having incurred Ishtar's displeasure spoilt Don Mac-Clean's day in any way. Nothing could have done that short of missing every bird, and his bag that evening was by no means the smallest. Also he was the only gun who had secured a woodcock. Lord Hawkhurst congratulated him, and said he thought it was time that John had a gun, whereat John relapsed into a state of ecstasy bordering on delirium.

All the same Don was very glad to find an eager and smiling Ishtar waiting to greet him when they got back. Perhaps she had not really been vexed.

The ladies all came out and looked at the birds laid out in rows in the big courtyard, and Don showed Ishtar his woodcock with its queer long beak and pretty feathers,

and he wanted to give her the special little feather from under the wing to wear in her hat. But Ishtar insisted that he must wear it himself like Grandpa and Daddy did.

Don was rather glad she insisted. It had been a bit of a wrench to part with that feather. Ishtar watched him fasten it into his cap with his capable, square-tipped fingers. They smelt of grease and gunpowder. A little bloody tuft of feathers had caught in the rough tweed of his coat sleeve. He picked it off and flecked it on to the ground among the dead little bodies. Without warning, suddenly, a wave of disgust, of sick horror, swept over her. An awful, empty, horrible feeling. She wanted to cry.

That night in bed she did cry. She buried her face in the pillow and did not dare to look at the star above the top of the tallest tree. She thought of Copper Top and of the birds flying round his head in the sunshine, of Don with his gun and the little bloody tuft of feathers on his sleeve, and of the rows of little dead birds.

Yet of course men shot birds! It was a quite right thing to do. A man ought to be a good shot. That is what some birds are there for, to shoot and eat. Copper Top did not understand that perhaps.

But somehow she wished she had been with Copper Top all these days. Then she thought of Don sitting at the end of the canoe—the light on his sunburnt face and fair hair—of course men killed things—things had to be killed. That was why men were strong—so's they did not mind. And Don did love animals. He was even good to cats. John and Richard hunted them. The angel in the star? The angel in the star would know.

She opened her eyes and found the sun streaming in at the open window. The birds outside were singing in gay and cheerful chorus. The trouble of last night had



vanished with its mists. She did not even remember it. It might come creeping up again at bedtime, one never knew, but now it was gone. The wisteria garlands round the window danced in the golden light. The long tendrils beckoned. The forest called to her. She wanted Copper Top.

There was no shooting party that day. Lord Hawkhurst was beating round some outlying field and hedges with the three boys. To Don's relief Ishtar expressed no desire to go with them. His instinct was against having girls about on these occasions. But he was very conscious of the blank on his return, when no dainty figure was there to greet him and be interested in the Blue Jay that he had shot for her. The wings were ever so pretty and would look well in a hat he thought.

The shooters had tea in the school-room, and Lady Condor came and poured out for them. She was in her element. It reminded her of the days when her boys had been young and Mummy to tea was a special treat. Nor did she fail Don. Her dear shrewd eyes had noticed the little romance with sympathy as well as amusement. It is never too early or too late for a woman to begin match-making. And what better match could there be for Ishtar than Don MacClean?

"Ishtar has gone up to spend the afternoon at Cousin James'," she said. "He has adopted a little boy, you know. Quite a dear. I think you boys would like him. Though I really believe he can never have played with another boy in his life—and I cannot imagine your Cousin James playing. Darling! I believe you must have put some sugar in the milk jug, or is it the teapot? My tea is quite sweet——"

After Lord Condor had denied the possibility of such a thing, and finally, to the huge delight of the boys and

his wife, been convicted by sampling the milk, conversation was resumed.

"Father asked me to go and see Mr. Godolphin one day before I leave, Aunt Marion," said Don. The Condors and MacCleans owned a very distant cousinship, and she had been "Aunt Marion" to him from his babyhood. "I might go up now and I could bring Izzy back with me."

Lady Condor nodded. "Quite a good idea," she said, "and then you will have got the visit off your mind. Your father and James were at Cambridge together I think—or was it Oxford—I always mix the two up—but anyway they were there together. And that funny little man Pendlebury. Most amusing. I should like to meet him again. Though I hear he has grown rather odd—most men do if they don't marry. They have no one to tell them of their peculiarities, of course. I believe he gardens in bare feet and deciphers dreams for people, or something odd like that. But where were we? Oh, yes. My dear, I think perhaps if you are going you had better start at once, or it will be time to be coming home before you get there."

Don stood up, hesitated, and looked at Lord Condor.

"Might I take my gun with me, sir?" he asked. "I might see something on my way."

Lord Condor smiled. He remembered the days when he had been well content to hang about with a gun for hours, on the off-chance of a shot.

"I'm afraid there is precious little to be had on that side of the estate," he said. "It's not worth walking over. Still you might pick up a rabbit or two or a pigeon. Keep a bit off the straight track, to the left, after you get over the stile."

Whether the wild pigeons have some occult means of

sensing a gun is a matter of conjecture. It often seems so. At any rate Don saw none as he tramped up through the forest, and the rabbits, as Copper Top would have known, were at this hour feeding out on the high grass land. Don himself seemed the only moving thing except the dancing flies in the shafts of sunlight that fell slantwise through the green shadows.

Certainly Lord Condor had been right. There was precious little to be had on this side of the estate, indeed there was nothing. But it was a jolly place. Ishtar would like it. He stood for a moment, pleasantly conscious of the warm forest scent, of the green shade. Then, suddenly, eye, body and hand were all instantly alert. The grey-blue flash of a pigeon's wings! An easy shot! The report of his gun crashed and shattered the stillness, a shudder ran above the whispering trees, there was the dull light thud of a falling body among the last year's leaves beside the track, and Don felt the warm glow of delight that still rushed through his veins when he brought his quarry down.

Grey wings fluttered among the leaves, and he ran forward quickly. It might be a runner. He was sorry he had not killed the bird dead. A good sportsman ought to do so. But he had not had enough practice yet.

And then, mysteriously sprung, so it seemed to Don, from nowhere, another boy was confronting him over the body of the pigeon. A strange-looking boy! An anger so intense burnt in his eyes that it actually resembled fire.

"You shot the pigeon," he accused, and the anger and contempt in his voice was of such a quality that it brought the blood heavily into Don's face.

"Yes, I did," he answered stiffly. "I have Lord Condor's permission." He supposed the boy thought he was



trespassing. He must be Mr. Godolphin's boy. There was no need for him to get into such a tearing rage though.

"You are the Thing that sets steel traps, and I am going to fight you, and I hope I'll kill you," said Copper Top, and descended upon him with the fury and the swiftness of a whirlwind.

Reeling back under the unexpected onslaught, Don, to his dismay, caught sight of Ishtar's white frock among the trees. Hang it all! She was following the boy!

"Go away, Izzy," he shouted. "Go away."

He was defending himself as best he could without hitting back. The boy was younger than he was, smaller. He did not want to hurt him. But the little devil knew how to fight! He parried his blows with increasing difficulty, and presently a clean left-hander landed on the corner of Don's mouth. It cut his lip against a tooth. He tasted blood, and his forbearance vanished. Very well! If the little fool wanted it he should have it!

Ishtar had not gone back, she had halted at a little distance. She called out to them, begging them to stop, but she called to deaf ears, and presently she buried her face in her hands and began to cry. She could hear the sounds of their shuffling feet, of their heavy breathing, now and then a gasp——

Don was fighting as furiously now as Copper Top. The fierce joy of battle seized him, for he had met his match, and finally it was only his superior weight and height that enabled him to get a blow in with sufficient force to send Copper Top rolling over and over like a shot rabbit. Ishtar's scream stopped him from following up his advantage. He checked his forward rush and stood breathing heavily with clenched fists until his senses gradually returned to him.

Copper Top lay for a moment where he had fallen, then he staggered to his feet with a half-blind movement and tried to come up to the fight again. His head was buzzing curiously and his legs seemed to have no strength in them. He made a step forward, then fell again on to his knees and made pitiful, unavailing efforts to lift himself up with his right hand. The blood was running from his nose. His shining head drooped.

Ishtar ran forward, sobbing. She knelt beside him and put her arms round him.

"No," he said, and pushed her away. His lip was swelling and his words came thickly. "I don't want you. Go away."

He stretched out his hand, drew the dead pigeon into his arms and staggered to his feet. There for a moment he swayed to and fro, unable to keep his balance.

Don looked, and felt sick. All his anger faded away. It was a beastly thing he had done.

"Look here," he said. "I'm very sorry I killed the pigeon, but I didn't know it was yours. How could I? We always shoot the wild ones. And I didn't want to fight you. Will you shake hands?"

Copper Top looked at him over the little body of the dead pigeon, and drew back as from something evil. This was one of the Things that set the steel straps for rabbits. He had learnt to box so that he might fight them. But it was no good. They were too strong. He looked at Don's outstretched hand and shuddered. Then he turned away with the pigeon in his arms and walked unsteadily into the green waiting shadows. It was all he could do to move, but he had to get away. He had to. And his body was an aching weight that he had to carry with him. He had never felt like this before. His eyes were full of something scalding, they smarted, he

could not see properly. He tried to go fast and nearly fell again. The blood from the dead bird dripped on to his feet as he went, drop after drop. Something had got him by the throat and was choking him. He looked up despairingly at the tall tree tops. If he could only get up there! But he could hardly move. For the first time he felt the burden of his body. He was in bonds, a captive.

The choking feeling in his throat grew worse. He crept in among the tall bracken. The great fronds looked so fine and clean, so full of life. He lay among the soft grasses at their feet and felt the earth's touch, close and cool and comforting. Great drops of hot water came from his eyes and rained down his cheeks and soaked away among the grasses. He wiped them away with his hand. They had mixed with the blood on his face. He wondered what had happened to him.

It was the first time in his life that Copper Top had shed tears.

The choking feeling in his throat was better now, only his breath came funnily in throbs that shook his whole body.

He lay there for a long time.

Now and then he stroked the dead pigeon with his poor little wet blood-stained fingers. Living birds circled above and cried. Presently he fell asleep.

Don and Ishtar looked after the staggering little figure until it was out of sight. Then she burst into another and more violent fit of sobbing. Don put an awkward but reliably strong arm round her and mopped at her wet eyes with his handkerchief.

"Please do stop," he said.

His pleasant, everyday world seemed toppling around him. All this fuss and fighting because he had shot a wild pigeon.



"I c-can't b-bear to see Copper Top walking like that," sobbed Ishtar against his shoulder. "He always g-goes so quick. A-and his poor face!"

"Well, he's knocked my face about too," protested Don. "And he began. I didn't want to fight."

"You shot his pigeon," wailed Ishtar.

Don mopped up more tears. He felt she was unjust, but he hated to see her cry.

"How did I know it was his pigeon?" he asked. "It was a wild one. I'm beastly sorry about it," he added after a moment or two during which Ishtar did not cease to sob. "Let's go after him and see if he'll make it up now."

"We'd never find him. You can't find Copper Top if he doesn't want you to. And he told me to go away."

The sobs broke into a wail.

"Most fellows would rather be left alone after they've had a beating," said Don consolingly. "I would I know."

He wished though he hadn't had to hit the little fellow so hard. He wished the boy had not refused to shake hands. It was by no means the first fight Don MacClean had engaged in, also by no means the first time he had more or less severely punished his adversary. But this time he had a vaguely disconcerting feeling that he was on the wrong side. The Victory was his, but the honours somehow lay with Copper Top. He felt injured. "You are the Thing that sets steel traps." And as a matter of fact he had been dead against them ever since he had found a little bloody leg in one, bitten off by its owner. He had persuaded his father, who was The MacClean of MacClean and not easily persuaded by anyone, to forbid their use on the estate. Also the pigeon was a wild one.

All these thoughts jumbled together more or less confusedly in his mind, while Ishtar's sobs became less violent, and she got her own minute handkerchief out of a pocket in her petticoat.

"Look here, Izzy," he said at length, "if you think it's no good trying to find him, I'd better go up and tell Mr. Godolphin what has happened. I was going to see him, anyway, and I can't very well sneak away now as though I were ashamed."

"Your lip is all c-cut, and there's some blood on your shirt, and your eye's all s-shutting up," said Ishtar.

"*Please* don't start crying again Izzy," said poor Don. "I'm all right. Boys knock each other about a bit, you know."

The interview with Mr. Godolphin was not a thing to look forward to, and if Ishtar started crying again he felt it would be the last straw.

"Please don't start again," he repeated, and took hold of her hand. They had never walked hand in hand before, and Ishtar swallowed very hard indeed and tried to live up to it.

"Cousin James is understanding," she said, taking her turn as the consoler. "If you tell him how it was then he'll 'splain to Copper Top."

Nevertheless when she had fled to Rose and Kathleen in the kitchen and Don stood outside the Professor's door it was undoubtedly one of the unpleasantest moments of his life.

When you have got to take a nasty fence it's no good looking at it. Words of his father's when he had taught him to ride. They came into his mind now. He lifted his hand, knocked with unnecessary violence on the door before him, and went in.

The Professor looked up from his writing, startled out

of his usual inattention to all else by the unusual and imperative knocking followed by the abrupt entrance. He blinked with astonishment at the strange boy standing in the doorway.

"God bless my soul," he exclaimed. "Who are you?"

For Don, having made his plunge into the room, was standing tongue-tied, unable to utter a word. He was never shy and rarely nervous, but now both sensations rushed together and shattered his courage to bits. Should he explain who he was first, or should he tell what had happened. He could not think how to begin. A dull red flush crept into his face, but the honest brown eyes met the Professor's steadily. The Professor liked the look of him. He would have been a handsome boy if his face had not been a bit lop-sided. A nice face too.

"Do you want to see me about something?" he asked kindly.

With a desperate effort Don blurted out who he was, and the Professor got up and held out a welcoming hand. The boy was very unlike his father if he was shy, he thought.

"Don MacClean's son, eh?" he exclaimed. "I'm very pleased to see you."

But the boy did not move.

"I'd rather not shake hands, if you don't mind, until you've heard what's happened," he said.

What on earth did the boy mean? The wildest ideas floated across the Professor's mind.

Briefly, baldly, standing very straight, and looking him in the face, Don told him.

"Is he very badly hurt?" asked the Professor.

"No, sir, at least not what we'd think much of. I got as good as I gave." Don's eyes twinkled at the Professor's satisfied grunt. Thank goodness, the worst was



over. "I had to knock him right out at the end or he'd have knocked me. But I'm ever so sorry about it, sir. You see, I didn't know."

"No, you couldn't know." The Professor sat down rather heavily. "The fault really rests with me. I—I——" He looked at Don. Yes, he liked his face. Perhaps he could help. Another boy. "I am afraid," he said, after that moment's pause, "I am afraid I have not brought him up in the wisest way. You see, I was writing a book for the first few years after I picked him up, and by the time I began to take a proper interest in his education he was sworn brother to everything that can fly or run or swim. There are no wild things as far as he is concerned. It is so extraordinary and so—so beautiful in a way—that I've shirked telling him that we kill every living thing that we can get at on the face of the globe if they are of any use to us for food or clothing or sport. I hoped it would dawn on him gradually."

"He ought to know, sir," said Don, with some not unnatural feeling.

"I know," replied the Professor guiltily. "But it's not so easy as it sounds."

"But—but that is why the animals and birds are put into the world."

"Is it?" asked the Professor.

Don stared. He had always heard that James Godolphin was peculiar, but this question was silly.

"Well," said the Professor, answering the stare. "I'll be hanged if I'm sure about it! Man has taken up that view. But from the point of view of their Creator how is it? As for the animals themselves, I should imagine Man appears to them as some sort of a Devil in an otherwise pleasant and well-ordered Universe."

Don did not like to quote the Bible—besides, he was not quite sure of the words—but certainly, somewhere in Genesis, God had handed every living thing over to Adam for his special use and benefit. Of course that did not mean that he might be cruel to them.

“I know foreigners are pretty rotten to animals,” he said. “But not English people, I don’t think.”

An idea struck the Professor. His face brightened. Here was a fellow—a really nice fellow—with the typical outlook seemingly on the world in general of the ordinary human boy. If only he and Copper Top would strike up a friendship! The beginning was unpropitious. Undoubtedly. But this boy had no ill-feeling over it. Neither would Copper Top have when he understood.

“Look here,” he said. “By the way, what did you say your name was?”

“Donald, sir. Most of my friends call me Don.”

“Then I will too, if I may. Now I wonder if you will help me?”

“I’ll be very glad if it is anything I can do,” said Don, and he meant it.

The Professor got up and perambulated the room with his hands behind his back and his beard stuck out.

“If you would come up and make friends with the boy,” he said, after a moment or two. “Talk the thing out together, you know. You are quite right when you say he ought to know. He can’t go about fighting everybody who kills the things he’s fond of. It means, more or less, that his hand will be against every man. He will keep his own point of view, of course, nothing will change that now. But it will help if he can understand other people’s.”

“Wouldn’t it be better, sir, if you——” began Don.

“It would not,” interrupted the Professor, and

stopped abruptly in his perambulations. "Don't you see"—his eyes twinkled as he looked down at Don—"that my point of view is inclined to be the same as his?"

"Then isn't there someone else——?"

"No," interrupted the Professor again. "What I want him to get at is the ordinary normal outlook of the decent public schoolboy. You see he's got to go to school."

"Yes," said Don. "Of course I'll be glad to do what I can. And I'd like to explain to him about my shooting his pigeon, you know. I did try, but he wouldn't listen. He wouldn't shake hands."

This evidently rankled in Don's mind. A decent chap ought to shake hands after a fight. It ought to settle the matter.

The Professor smiled. He had an awfully nice smile, Don thought.

"You mustn't forget that you appeared suddenly on his horizon and destroyed a life that he loved and valued, for no valid reason whatever that he can see, except the pleasure of killing."

Don moved a little uneasily in his chair.

"Did you kill the bird dead?" asked the Professor.

"Not quite, I'm afraid, sir." Don's pleasant eyes looked distressed. "You see," he added apologetically, "I'm really only learning. I think a fellow ought to be a dead shot."

"Well, I think you will find Copper Top will shake hands if you care to come up and see him to-morrow. He's generally just, if he understands. And then," added the Professor suddenly remembering his manners, "I'd like to hear something about my old friend. I hope he is well?"

"Yes, thank you, sir, and I'd like to come up to-



morrow very much if I may. I ought to be going now. But might I have a wash first? I don't want to frighten Aunt Marion."

"Of course! Of course! I ought to have thought of it before. We will get some hot water," exclaimed the Professor, conscience-stricken. But for the life of him he could not help surveying the work of Copper Top's fists with satisfaction.

"Kathleen!" he roared. But no little woman appeared as usual in the doorway.

Mistress Jones was out in the forest, wandering among likely places, calling in soft distress like some mother bird, with the thought of her baby's beautiful clear face all bruised and bleeding tearing at her heart-strings.

So Rose found warm water and towels and helped Don to restore himself to order, while Ishtar, actually glad to be lifted on to a knee and held close, gave the Professor her account of the great fight.

"I do think Cousin James is really understanding, though he doesn't look like it," she said, riding home on Jane's broad back with Don walking beside her, and her world more or less restored to its proper equilibrium.

"I should think he is a good sort," agreed Don. "But he has very odd ideas about things."

That night when he read the usual bit for the day out of his Bible he looked up the First Chapter of Genesis and the verses which dealt with Adam's lordship over living things.

"And God said: Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

It was not quite what he had thought.

He read on.

"And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat."

No, it was not what he had thought.

The star above the tallest tree top, that looked in at Ishtar's window, looked in at his. It shone to-night very brightly.

But Don was staring at the well-polished barrel of his gun. He had never yet been able to harden his heart sufficiently to leave it in the gun-room. As he looked he could feel the cool smooth stock in his grip, the thrill when he raised it to his shoulder. He picked it up almost tenderly and took an imaginary aim through the open window. And along the glittering barrel he sighted the star.

A long shot. He laughed, put down his gun, and tumbled into bed.

## CHAPTER XII

DON slipped away very early the next morning, so that he might do so unseen. He wanted too, rather badly, to get the matter settled up with Copper Top; to put himself right with the little chap. He wished more than ever that he had not shot his pigeon. Various recollections of the whole beastly affair remained vivid and unpleasant. Yet he could not see where he had really been in fault. A fellow couldn't possibly guess—it was just a bit of rotten luck.

So the thoughts ran through his mind, and his usually serene and cheerful countenance was clouded with anxiety as he climbed the forest pathway. A small rabbit scudded across his path, an easy shot, but his fingers did not itch for the smooth stock of his beloved gun. He would as soon have shot one of Lady Condor's West Highlanders as anything in the little chap's part of the forest, now that he knew. Suppose he could not make him understand.

It was a dull, heavy morning. Quite early there had been some thunder rain. Everything smelt sweet, but it was intensely hot and airless. He thought there must be a storm brewing. Whew! It was close here among the trees. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he climbed. The little chap was probably fretting about his pigeon still.

Presently he came to the pond below the little streams, and standing with his feet among the ripples at its edge was Copper Top. He was quite naked. His slim white



figure was beautiful, Don thought, and Don was unused to noticing if things were beautiful. His attitude was that of one who waited. He looked down at Don as he came up the path, and in his wide clear eyes dwelt speculation. Don felt as if he were a specimen of some sort being inspected, coldly and critically inspected. It gave him a curiously unpleasant sensation, but he faced the situation in the dogged way Don faced things that had to be done, however unpleasant. As he came close he could see the mark of his fists on Copper Top's face. A discoloration here and there, giving it a curious appearance, purple-blue and green under translucent white, like veined marble. The whole face, too, had that transparent look—translucent. Don thought suddenly of a white water-lily that Ishtar had picked and dropped, and he had inadvertently put the heel of his boot on some of its shining petals. A careless thought of half-regret had passed through his mind for the spoilt perfection.

There were birds flying round Copper Top's head, but as Don came they scattered, and there was silence. The tinkle of the little streams as they fell into the pond only seemed to accentuate it. What on earth should he say. It was a beastly uncomfortable silence, but for the life of him he could not think what to say.

At last he blurted out, "Look here! I came up to tell you I'm so sorry. You see, I didn't understand. I wouldn't kill anyone's pets for anything——"

There was something desperate in the earnestness with which he spoke.

A puzzled look crept into the coldness of Copper Top's inspection. His aloofness fell away.

"I don't understand too," he said. "But 'Dophin says it's not your fault because you've been taught it is right to kill things."

"Only the wild ones, and for food," answered Don eagerly. "I wouldn't hurt anyone's pets for anything," he repeated.

"I see," said Copper Top slowly. "That's why they're all afraid of you, of course. And then you call them wild."

"I don't know about that. They've always been wild, I expect. Rabbits now, you know, they'd overrun everything if they weren't kept down."

"Dophin told me all that. I've been thinking about it." Copper Top's brows drew together. "I think you're all wrong. It's their own life, it isn't yours. Their own life here, I mean. You've no right to take it 'cause you want to eat their bodies or 'cause you like to shoot. But I think it's like this. People are the same as Stoats and Carrion Crows, you know. They haven't learnt anything better yet."

Don's face flushed. "Oh, I say!" he began, and paused. The boy was talking nonsense of course, but after all the great thing was that he was ready to make it up. "I don't think it's quite the same thing, you know. And then there's the sport. A fellow isn't much good as a rule if he isn't a decent sportsman."

"Sport? That's fun, isn't it?" queried Copper Top. "You kill for fun? It makes you happy?"

"Well, in a way," acknowledged Don.

The conversation was not taking altogether a satisfactory turn. He felt vaguely that he was not keeping his promise to the Professor. But he *had* brought the little chap up in a queer way!

He made another effort. "You see, it isn't only the fun of it. There's the skill and—and—that sort of thing, you know."

"Skill? But you can use that for everything," said

Copper Top, with his queer little air of puzzled patience with the incredibly impossible.

"After all," said Don rather desperately, "what are they all here for if they aren't for us to make use of?"

Copper Top looked more puzzled than ever.

"Well I think they're here just the same's we are," he said. "Why not? And I like them better than People. Some of them kill for their food, but none of them kill for fun. I do not understand."

He looked thoughtfully at Don. He liked his clean clear brown face. He liked the way his eyes looked at you. They were just the colour of the little streams that ran high up on the moorland deep down among the grass and the heather.

"You don't understand too," he said kindly. "It is a pity."

Then suddenly the boys smiled at each other.

"I will shake hands," said Copper Top.

They shook hands gravely. Don felt rather shy and awkward, but Copper Top's easy grace of manner shone more brightly in this moment of undoubted emotion. A moment in which something important came into being.

"Come into the water. It will be cooler," he said, and slipped into it like some big shining fish.

"I'd like to." Don hesitated on the brink. "But I haven't got a towel."

"There's the sun," Copper Top called back. "It will be out soon's we want it. Come on!" He somersaulted across the pond, sprang up to the top of the lowest waterfall, and stood poised for a dive. "Come on!" he called again.

Don hesitated no longer. He hurried out of his clothes and plunged in. The water felt so good. It was only a



halting place for the little streams from the high springs, and always fresh and sweet on the hottest day. The boys splashed about in it for quite a while, and with every minute they became greater friends. Don was a fine swimmer, but Copper Top was a fish. He was the better man in the water, and Don loved him for it.

The sun came out right enough as Copper Top had said it would. He jumped out of the water and shook himself in the full blaze just as a dog does, so that he was dry almost at once. Don did the same, but he could not do it so well.

"Now we will run up for breakfast," said Copper Top, and ran.

Don had to wait to collect his clothes and put on his shoes. What a nuisance they were! Then he started to catch Copper Top up. He was the champion sprinter at his school, and that meant something, so he anticipated no difficulty. Soon he found he might, with equal chance of success, try to overtake the wind. Copper Top was the better man at running, and Don loved him for it.

When he caught sight of him again he was tumbling in the meadow grass with the two dogs.

Don scattered his clothes to the winds and joined the game. Copper Top shouted, and the dogs barked. Birds were flying all about.

Don lay on his back in the soft warm grass, and shouted too. He was as dry as a bone now. Running Water and King Edward came up and investigated him with friendly velvet noses. A chiff-chaff was pecking about among the rough hair on the donkey's back. The martins came flying low. He had never seen them on the move so close. Their long wings were wonderful. The dogs came and competed for attention. It was all extraordinarily pleasant.

He fell upon Copper Top and rolled him over and over in the grass. Then Copper Top got the upper hand and buried Don's face in a patch of white clover.

"I say! It smells good!" Don mumbled, with his mouth full of the fragrant stuff, and lay very still. Then with a sudden violent effort he broke free and bolted with such speed that he tumbled over himself into the grass again and lay, laughing and panting, until Copper Top came and pulled him up.

"Let's go in to breakfast," he said. "I am hungry." He held his arms out wide. "As hungry as that."

"So am I," said Don. "I could eat a——"

He stopped. He had very nearly said "a whole chicken." As he followed Copper Top through the wicket-gate in the sweet briar hedge he wondered if they never killed even a chicken. Really that would be carrying things a bit far!

A chiff-chaff was singing like a thing possessed from the top of the pear tree. Copper Top looked up towards it.

"I wonder if they will come in to breakfast with you here," he said.

Don decided that they did not kill even chicken, and wondered what there would be for breakfast. He sent a wistful thought towards the loaded sideboard at the Castle. That York ham! And the cold salmon! Would they only have bread and butter and jam here? Eggs would be all right—but no bacon.

The Professor was already seated at the table drinking some coffee, which smelt uncommonly good, and eating oatcake with Devonshire cream. And there were eggs, fried eggs with tomatoes, and hot rolls and scones, and several sorts of jam, and honey in the comb. And lettuce and radishes, and all sorts of fruit. The Devonshire

cream was in bowls. Everyone had a bowl to themselves. It wasn't half a bad spread!

And the Professor seemed ever so glad to see him, and the chiff-chaffs *did* come in. The jolliest perky little fellows. Don enjoyed his breakfast thoroughly. They talked of a lot of interesting things too, and the Professor told some ripping stories of his experiences in the Secret Service during the war. After breakfast he offered Don a cigarette, as man to man, while they chatted.

The Professor also was delighted. Never had he felt so secure about the boy, so satisfied that he would get on all right out in the world. He had a few minutes conversation with Don when Copper Top vanished to put on the few garments he condescended to wear.

"It's all right between you, I see," he said.

"Rather, sir," answered Don, and something in the Professor's face made him add, "He's a first-class little chap, I think."

"You don't look on him as a silly, effeminate sort of fellow?"

"Not much, sir," said Don emphatically, and laughed. "It was only my weight gave me the pull yesterday. And—why he can beat me at running, or swimming, easily, and I can run a bit against quite good chaps."

The Professor nodded. "But he'll never make a sportsman, and I don't know that I want him to."

"I don't think I do either," said Don, and then was surprised at himself for saying so. "It won't matter," he added, "he can go in for games."

"Well," said the Professor doubtfully, "you see, so far he says he can't see why anybody should want to hit a ball about, or what's the good of trying to beat anyone else at it!"

"That is a pity!" exclaimed Don. "He'd be pretty



useful at games, too. His boxing's uncommonly good for a fellow of his size."

"Oh, he can do anything that wants a quick eye and hand if he likes," said the Professor. "I——" he hesitated a moment. "I got him to learn to box because he wanted to be able to fight anyone who was cruel—steel traps and that sort of thing. But I don't know that I was wise. He can't go about hitting everyone in the face whom he will think cruel."

"It's a jolly useful thing to be able to do," said Don comfortingly. "And he'll understand all right in time."

The Professor was not so sure that Copper Top would ever understand, but at any rate Don MacClean would help considerably to that most desirable end. The more the Professor saw of him the more he liked him. He watched the two boys go down the garden path through the flowers and the bees towards the Beech Grove. Don's arm was round Copper Top's shoulders, their heads were close together.

The Professor smiled, wondering what so engrossed them, and went in happily to his work.

His new book was to be a History of Human Fetishes from the earliest Magician's gruesome philtres and tortures down to the last modern discovery of equally gruesome Back Stairs to Youth, Health and Heaven. He was enjoying it enormously. It proved everything he had ever said. And more—much more!

The hot September sunshine streamed into his study in all its full morning glory, carrying the pungent refreshing scent of autumn flowers; the wasps and bees buzzed in and out, tremendously busy about something, and making a furious fuss about it; and the Professor sat with an open book on his left hand and another propped

up in front of him, and read and jotted and scribbled with an absorption that was almost ecstatic.

Presently he became aware that an attempt, as persistent but different to the wasps, was being made from the outside world to attract his attention. He put out a protesting hand, but it continued, and gradually assumed the shape of a voice, saying politely:

"I beg your pardon, Cousin James, but please may I speak to you?"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Professor. "Have you been there long, my dear?"

It was Ishtar, perfect, complete, and exquisitely finished as a flower. She stood beside his chair and smiled at him.

"Not *very*," she said. "But I've said 'How do you do?' three times."

"You don't say so," said the Professor, astonished and penitent.

"I'm *very* sorry for 'sturbing you," Ishtar continued earnestly. "But I had to come, and I did want to know is Don up here?"

The Professor looked round. "He was," he replied. "Yes, of course he was, just now." Then his eye encountered the clock. "Bless my soul, why it's past eleven! He was here to breakfast. That must have been about eight o'clock."

"Did Copper Top forgive him?" she asked.

"Yes, my darling."

"I am glad. And I do want to see Copper Top."

"They must be out in the woods somewhere. They went off together of course—yes——"

The Professor smiled as he remembered the two figures.

"Cousin James, I—I'm going away to-morrow," said Ishtar in a rather quavering little voice.

"What!" exclaimed the Professor, and grunted with most satisfying dismay and sympathy.

"Mummy is taking me to the sea. I do think it is pretty rotten luck."

Ishtar had begun to pick up curious expressions from the boys. It had possibly weighed with Lady Hawkhurst when she had decided on a few weeks at the seaside.

"So do I," said the Professor heartily.

Ishtar climbed up on to his knee. "I do think you are understanding," she sighed. "Though you don't look like it a bit."

"No, I suppose not," owned the Professor.

"'Cept p'raps your eyes sometimes," conceded Ishtar. She leant her fair head back against his shoulder. It ached, and she was tired. She had only secured permission to visit the Little House with difficulty and in collusion with Grannie. She did not want to go away. It gave her a lump in her throat to think of it.

But she felt better with Cousin James. He *was* understanding. He hadn't told her she would love the seaside when she got there, and talked about digging on the sands and picking up shells. He didn't say she was lucky to be going, and that he wished he had the chance.

"Cousin James, dear, I do love Copper Top and the woods and the wild creatures and being up here, and all these last days I haven't come 'cos Don and the boys were there, and I think that's why I feel so bad—I didn't know they were the last——"

"No," murmured the Professor. "No—one doesn't."

"And I did hate Don hurting Copper Top's face. And I do think Copper Top is right about not k-killing things, only when I'm not up here it does seem right that Don ought to be a good shot, like Daddy and Grandpa."

Two large tears gathered.



"Yes, I know," said the Professor. "I feel like that myself." Then he had an inspiration. "Look here, I tell you what. We won't make up our minds at all just yet. We'll only remember that they are both first-rate fellows, and not worry about anything else."

"You don't think it matters about which of them is right?"

"Well, they've got to do what they think right themselves, not what you and I think right. So long as they both do that I think we ought to be satisfied, don't you?"

The two big tears brimmed over and splashed down on to the Professor's waistcoat.

"You see, C-Cousin James," said Ishtar, "I do love them both so much."

## PART II

### CHAPTER I

THE Professor looked round his study as one who greets old friends after a long absence. He accepted the smiling invitation of the stout volumes in calf and vellum and took down one and another, handling them with that subtly tender touch that bespeaks the lover and the owner. Copper Top would say they knew him. Well, why not?

There was Milo, still rending his oak. The Professor laid a friend's hand on the close-curved bent head, then ran it down the tense muscles of the beautiful forearm; just by way of greeting.

He sat at the writing-table, and passed his fingers along the worn rolled edge of the mahogany, recognised various ink spots and the burnt hole in the leather. It looked a bit forlorn, the old table, with no books or papers on it, in spite of a wonderful bowl of hyacinths. The whole room was unfamiliarly tidy, as if it had put on Sunday clothes to greet him. But it was pleasant to see it again. He sniffed with satisfaction the well-remembered scent of books and flowers and tobacco mingling with the silken forest winds drifting through the open window. It was one of those amazingly sweet-smelling things, a wet spring day. Soft and thick and

shining the rain fell over the grey-green world, and the intoxicating fragrance of growing things was everywhere.

The pear tree was in full bloom. How white the blossom was! A throstle sat there calling to his mate.

He was glad to be back and feel he was settled here for a while again. Sitting at the old writing-table he recaptured the writer's joy in his work. His book on Human Fetishes; now he would finish it. And what copy he had secured! First-hand copy. Amazing!

Eight years! It was a good slice out of a man's life. But what years they had been! Never would he have more wonderful years, however many lives he might traverse. Eight years trekking the world with Copper Top. Would he ever really settle down again! And if the boy called would he not follow? Of course he would! A damned fool too if he didn't! Yes, they had been simply tremendous, those eight years. He chuckled over many a gay and cheerful memory as he sat in his old place by the wood fire and sucked at his pipe. Marion Condor. He had met her at the station. A pleasant sight. "I am getting old," she had said. Old? He did not feel a day older. He felt younger. He had been growing younger every day of that eight years. "You will never be old," he had answered. He smiled as he thought of her, waving several scarves at him and calling back as she went, "I do my best!" Her smile and her scarves were still like rainbows.

Old? The Professor snorted. He had never felt so young since he and Margot had lived in Paradise. Copper Top—the young rogue—what a time they had had together. The absolute gay, glad enjoyment of it. The glory and goodness of it. His thoughts wandered back beyond those years, to the time when he worried himself



into fiddle-strings because he thought the boy must go to school. Why the devil had he thought the boy must go to school? Because every other boy went. A fine reason. He had been an old sheep after all, no better than the People he had despised.

He recalled interviews with the heads of various boys' schools, and chuckled. He heard himself stammering over his explanations of Copper Top's peculiarities. They had smiled at him indulgently. The only peculiarity that had really upset them was vegetarianism. That, of course, was impossible. They all agreed over that. It could not be tolerated. However, the other boys would soon laugh him out of it. Besides, hunger would soon induce a more healthy appetite. He need not worry.

He remembered the awful moment when, having finally deposited Copper Top at the most possible of the various establishments, he returned to the Little House alone. It made him feel sick even now. And then he laughed. Just a week later the boy had walked in at breakfast time. Fifty miles across country without map or chart as a bird flies back to its home. And perfectly sure of his welcome!

Then had come the thrilling moment when the obvious—of course—obvious—way out of it had suddenly burst upon him. He would continue the boy's education himself upon new lines. He would take him to see the world. He would take him to visit all nations. He would take him—and he remembered how words had failed him at the magnificence of the idea.

School! The dry-as-dust, second-hand knowledge. The ugliness. The deadly routine. Oh, the petty thing! And what had it resulted in? People who made wars. People who quarrelled in the name of God. People who—Ptcha! The emotion of the great day when that mag-

nificent thought came swept over him again. He had even taken the necessary step of resigning his Professorship with a minimum of regret.

And what a success it had been! For eight years they had wandered over the globe, he and that wonderful baby that he had picked up off the forest pathway. On foot or horse, on mules and camels, by sea and river, and never, if they could help it, by train. And they knew the Wide World and the wonder and glory of it, and the peoples who dwell upon it, and the birds and beasts and flowers, and tree and wood and stream, in a way that no man who travels by train can do. Was there anywhere they had not been, wondered the Professor, from the homely Breton village, the Norwegian Fjord, the Dutch Canal, to the great deserts, the trackless forests, and the far regions of ice and snow? From the old great cities of the world, where civilisations had risen and waned, to tiny villages hidden in crevices of mountains or lost on the edge of the plain?

And he had not neglected the boy's education on other lines. Certainly he had not. The heads of those various establishments for young gentlemen—he chuckled again as he thought of his interviews with them—they would no doubt consider the boy badly grounded. But what a lot he really knew. How many languages—like a native. And what a Greek scholar! He had had his voice trained too. The boy sang like all the angels, God bless him. And he was less noticeably unlike other people now. It was better it should be so. And yet—The Professor stared at the many-hued flames and recalled a night of stars on the African veldt; a day when the sun had blazed out of the pure blue of Eastern skies—the shadows had seemed alive; a day among the flowers on the Roman campagna. There were quite a

number of them. Had the boy indeed communion with things hidden from men, secret knowledge shared by secret beings? So that he loved things differently from others—for their own sakes? The Professor did not know. He had gathered up the fragments from Copper Top's table and been very happy. Happiness. It seemed such an easy thing to the boy.

The Professor began to nod. Copper Top. By the way—must remember—call him Jim—at Cambridge——

The Professor fell asleep. He had been travelling for a good many hours and had eaten a hearty lunch on arrival. But his dreams were pleasant. He smiled and snored, and once he stretched a wandering hand and murmured "Wanky." Was Wanky, whose bones lay beneath the pear tree, really there? Copper Top would say, "Why not?"

Kathleen woke him up an hour later bringing in the post. The Professor blinked, rubbed his eyes, and smiled at her.

"It's uncommonly pleasant to see you and the Little House again, Kathleen," he said.

Indeed Kathleen and the Little House were inseparable parts of the whole that was Home.

"And it's I that am glad to see you back, Himself," she answered.

She looked smaller and greyer and more secretive than ever, but her smile at him was worth having. He waved the letter she had handed him towards the empty chair on the other side of the hearth.

"Sit down, and let us have a bit of a chat," he said. "Why, let me see, it must be two years since we last ran back to have a look at you all."

"All that," she answered, sitting herself very bolt upright on the extreme edge of the chair, for Mistress



Jones knew what was becoming. "All that and a bit over. But sure and it's a grand time you've had."

Kathleen had had a weekly letter whenever in any way possible.

"That's true," said the Professor. "And how do you think the boy is looking?"

Didn't he know what she wanted to talk about!

"He looks fine as the sun, your honour, and grown like one of the saplings in the forest."

"Five foot ten, and I hope he'll stay at that. It's a good height for a man."

"I'm not thinking he could be improved." Mistress Jones sat very erect and proud. She thought of the boy as he had danced her round the kitchen in the delight of seeing her again. And she had not felt foolish, but young and glad for a few precious moments before he had flown out again, vaulting over the window-sill just like he used to do, and she had sat down with her apron over her head and wept for joy after the manner of mortals.

"And is it staying for a while now you will be?" she asked somewhat wistfully.

"Yes, Kathleen, we are going to settle down now, and the boy will be going to Cambridge in the autumn and I shall be going on with my book and it will be like old times again."

The Professor smiled at her benignly, but Kathleen said nothing. She knew better. "There are no birds in any last year's nest." And she knew more. That it is well that it is so. And yet——

"I'm thinking it will be time I got on with the scones for tea," she said, and stood up.

"Scones!" exclaimed the Professor. "They cook well

in many parts of the world, but I've tasted nothing to beat your scones, Kathleen. Let us have plenty of them, and jam, and cream."

"There's the gooseberry jam for your honour and the mulberry jam for—" She stopped suddenly. "What will I be calling him?" she asked. "Is it Mr. Copper Top or Mr. James?"

The Professor looked puzzled. "Well, Kathleen," he began. Then he stopped too. "I don't think I know," he said.

"Then," said Mistress Jones firmly, "it will be Mr. James."

"It will make him laugh!"

"Maybe. It's not understanding these things he is. But"—she swallowed something in her throat—"it's a man he is now within a little, and I'll not be wanting in respect to him."

"Perhaps you are right, Kathleen," said the Professor kindly. "I've been thinking I ought to call him James myself, or perhaps Jim will do."

Mistress Jones went to the manufacture of her scones and the Professor turned to the letter she had brought him, which he had been holding in his hand. It was from Pendlebury. He opened it, read, and laughed.

"Dear Jimmy," it ran. "It may have escaped your memory that there is a small entrance examination for the Varsity. A little rudimentary knowledge is necessary apart from Greek Verse and singing. Has the boy acquired this same by any odd chance? Should advise sending him to me for the next six months to lick into some conformity to type. Doubtful if he will ever settle down anywhere after the way brought up. If he does not, am prepared to join next eight years' trip. You've

been a damned sight more lucky than you deserve.  
Yours,

“PEN.”

The Professor snorted, then he grinned. He turned the letter over to the blank outside sheet, extracted a pencil from his waistcoat pocket and wrote:

“Conformity to type not desired. Don’t care a hang if he doesn’t settle down. Come and spend the long vacation here. In the meantime forward particulars asked for. Opinions not required. Yours,

“JIMMY.”

He had just finished this when Copper Top vaulted in at the open window and shook himself like a big dog. The scent of the rain on growing things filled the room. He came to the hearthrug and gave himself another shake in front of the fire, a gentler shake, and looked down at the Professor with his wide, cheerful smile.

Little Wolf, who had followed him, shook himself too, but he had no eyes for the Professor. He sat down in front of Copper Top, lifted his sharp muzzle, grey now with advancing years, and barked joyfully. Copper Top picked him up, and he nestled close with adoring eyes.

“He won’t let any of the other creatures come near me without going for them, the little wretch,” said Copper Top. “Oh, and Kathleen has just called me Mr. James! I must be grown up!”

The Professor looked at him as he stood before the fire watching the leaping flames and stroking the little black head against his shoulder. Looked and tried to be critical. But how can you be critical of a thing that gives out joy and vitality from, so it seemed to the Pro-



fessor, some radiant centre. And yet he had known people irritated by Copper Top. Over-rich, over-eaten, over-dressed people with no sense of humour and an exceedingly vast sense of their own importance. Had known him affect dyspeptic, jaundiced people with that same feeling that prompts a man or boy in a bad mood to throw a stone at any singing bird that crosses his path.

But the Professor was no longer anxious when he thought of Copper Top taking his place in the world, because gradually, through the years, the deepest and most vital difference between the boy and other people had dawned upon him. Copper Top judged things as they were, not by how they affected him. He might get hurt in his journey through life, he would get hurt, but never in the way the Professor had dreaded. And he had not grown up, as the Professor now realised he had feared, into something abnormal or effeminate.

Standing there, stroking Little Wolf and smiling at the Professor, he looked an entirely wholesome, capable, normal lad. Tall and straight and tough as a young sapling. Nothing abnormal about him whatever.

"Yes, I suppose you are grown up," he answered.

But he thought, "You have the secret of eternal childhood. What is it?" Was it that he lived always right in the centre of the hour, while the rest looked before and after, mourning over shrouded bygone yesterdays, or anticipating happier to-morrows? Was it——?

Well, what did it matter? So long as the boy kept that wide smile of his and that clean straight body. . . . Here he was—old fool—on the verge of worrying over the future again, and he had not worried for eight years. No wonder he felt younger. Did he ever want to bury himself again in the study of Human Fetishes? Those

most clinging bits of Humanity's long and dreary past. Decomposed of all of them—spreading disease——

Copper Top gave himself another little shake. Again the scent of wet woods made itself perceptible. The Professor got back into the centre of the moment. The rain was still wet in the boy's tossed shining hair. He had thrown his coat over a chair to dry and was in his shirt-sleeves. It was odd, however careless his dress, he never looked untidy.

"It's simply glorious!" he exclaimed. "You must come out after tea. It will stop raining about six. The sun will shine and everything will shout. You must come out and shout too."

The Professor smiled back at him. "Certainly I will. I meant to have a turn after lunch, but I began to handle my books, and then I believe I fell asleep."

"That is always a good thing if you remember your dreams," said Copper Top cheerfully. "It's jolly to be back again. The swallows are back too. The missal thrushes have their nest in the pear tree and two eggs in it. They showed me. And oh, 'Dophin, have you seen the kittens?"

He put Little Wolf down and vanished. A minute later he was back with an armful of sandy kittens with blue eyes and white stomachs, the latest generation of the Sandy Puss Family. He tumbled them all over Little Wolf, who sat in dignified disgust while they played with him as with a woolly ball that refused to be rolled over.

"I have had a letter from Pendlebury," said the Professor.

Copper Top sat up on his heels and took notice.

"He wants you to go to him to be coached for your exam in the autumn."

"You don't want me to, do you?"

"No," said the Professor honestly. "I don't."

"Then why are you wringing your beard off?"

The Professor unwrung it. "Because I'm not at all sure that he is not right."

"I shall never teach you not to worry," said Copper Top. "The spring has come. We are just back. We are perfectly happy. We have five kittens. I shall not go to Dr. Pen. We both know perfectly well I shall not go. And yet here you are worrying for fear I ought to go."

He reached for a kitten and sat the creature on his shoulder. They both looked at the Professor, and the Professor felt that the one did not look at him with more curiosity than the other.

"Suppose I never got to Cambridge at all. It wouldn't really matter, would it?" Copper Top concluded, and smiled at him.

"Well," began the Professor, and stopped. A faintly puzzled expression crept over his face. Why was he so desperately keen that the boy should go to Cambridge? A Varsity education. Was it after all . . . The thought snapped into his mind and left him speechless. Was it only another Fetish? A Public School and Varsity education. And the War. The hideous awful War. Hospitals. Mad Houses. Drink Shops. Vivisection Laboratories. The War. The Human Fiasco. School and Varsity Education. The highest Education. Good Lord, any education! Where did it lead after all?

He pulled himself together.

He had scrapped school, but he did not want to scrap Cambridge too. He had been very happy at Cambridge himself. It had been a great time.

"You see," he said, "I want you to go to Cambridge because it is the best education I know of."



"We will try it," agreed Copper Top gently. He had a curious way with the Professor sometimes as if he were talking to a child. "When the time comes," he added.

"There is an examination," murmured the Professor, fingering Pendlebury's letter.

"So," answered Copper Top cheerfully, with a good guttural accent.

"My dear boy," the Professor expostulated. They had spent one spring and summer wandering through Germany, through its great realms of forest, among its perpetual melody of river waters. They had enjoyed it enormously, but when Copper Top used German expressions the Professor earnestly wished he had never taken him there. Indeed he disliked him using any expressions in a foreign language. Other English boys might look on it as side, especially with such an excellent pronunciation. They would have in the Professor's day.

"Oh," said Copper Top, "I forgot. I'm sorry. What do they examine you in?"

"Well, I expect it's a bit different from what it was in my time. Nothing very stiff though, I imagine," answered the Professor. "I've suggested to Pen that he should come to us for the Long Vacation. He could coach you up in the subjects he thinks you are weak in."

"We will see." Copper Top smiled serenely. "It will be first-rate if he comes. And he will make you laugh. 'Dophin! Listen!"

He held up one hand. And, suddenly, so it seemed to the Professor, the room was filled with the throbbing melody of the missal thrush's song. A slender single theme given with full-throated ecstasy. It seized the air and flung it into silver waves, even as a sudden shaft of sunlight struck the falling rain to gold.

Copper Top stood up with one single movement to

his full height. The Professor looked at him and a ridiculous idea crossed his mind. Ridiculous? But it was so! The boy's face looked as if made of gold and silver. Translucent too. He could see Thoughts passing through it. Wonderful Thoughts. The boy was expecting something. He was waiting . . . listening.

The thrush had stopped singing in the sudden way he does. There was a curious pause . . . a silence.

Then someone knocked at the door. Kathleen to tell them the scones were ready, thought the Professor, and called out "All right." And then felt, quite absurdly, that he had broken something.

The door opened slowly, seductively, and a tall slip of a girl stood there smiling at them out of the shadows beyond . . . beautiful soft shadows.

She was dressed in a white mackintosh cape with the hood drawn over her head. The water dripped from it in a little shower, sprinkling with silver drops of light the polished floor. Her face was like a rain-washed rose-coloured flower.

"Undine!" flashed into the Professor's mind.

Copper Top moved towards her. She held out two bare hands wet with rain and he took them into his.

"You have come through water," he said and laughed. "Oh, Ishtar! How wonderful of you! How did you know?"

She looked up at him with sweet eyes, her face warm and radiant. "Grannie told me you were back," she said. "I had to come. I couldn't wait a minute. Oh, 'Dophin . . . dear 'Dophin. . . ."

She was between them now, each holding one hand.

"Take off your wet cloak, my dear."

"Oh, Copper Top, you have grown up! I think I expected you to be just the same!"

She slipped the hood back and unfastened the buttons of her mackintosh, the Professor complicating the matter with his assistance.

"You have your lovely wave still," said Copper Top, and stroked it with his fingers. "Am I grown up? I don't know. Age is a delusion. Look at 'Dophin!"

"You are tall," she said, still regarding him critically. "I believe you are nearly as tall as Don. Somehow I didn't think you would be. Oh, it is good to see you both again!" She turned from one to the other. "And the Little House. The dear Little House. And the kittens all over the place just like they used to be, the darlings. And the birds . . ."

There were ridiculous tears in her eyes. She had not known she cared so much. Her wet eyes were more like stars than ever.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Copper Top.

"At school," she answered, and pouted. "Brighton and Paris. I am now finished. Turned out according to the correct pattern. It wasn't bad fun on the whole," she added confidentially. "Only a lot of it was waste of time, I think. Don and I both thought so when we compared notes. He told me about the holidays he spent with you. It used to make me furious because I hadn't been there too. Furious! Just bubbling with angry regret. Like I used to feel when I had been sent to bed early when I was small, and then heard them talking of lovely things they had done while I wasn't there. I used to imagine what it would have been like to walk across those gorgeous Alps with you three, stopping just where we liked, and lying among the flowers, and climbing up into impossible places! I actually asked Mother if I couldn't. I begged her. And



she said, 'With those two boys and your *Cousin James!*' Oh, 'Dophin, if you could have heard her say, 'Cousin James.' "

"My dear," said the Professor, "I have the profoundest sympathy with her feelings."

"Grannie understood. She said"—Ishtar giggled—"she said 'If it wasn't for my figure, dear, I would take you myself.' Grannie is lovely always."

"You are like her, I think," said the Professor. "Like I remember her as a girl."

"Oh, do you think so?" asked Ishtar eagerly. "I am so glad. Everyone says I am so like Mother. That's just a big compliment, I know. But I'd rather be like Grannie than anybody."

"Likenesses are in the eyes of the beholder," misquoted the Professor. "Won't you sit down, my dear?"

"I can't. I'm too excited—or is it delighted? The last time I was here I sat on your knee and cried because I was going away. And now I am back. We will begin just where we left off like they do in the fairy stories."

She ran to the window and looked out.

"Doesn't it smell heavenly! The pear tree blossom looks like silver in the rain. It's raining harder than ever. Oh!"

Copper Top had joined her and so had the swallows.

"Oh, Copper Top! Oh, Copper Top! The darlings! Oh, look at them!"

"They've got a row of nests under the eaves."

"Oh, that one nearly touched my face!"

The young eager voices came back to the Professor. He smiled, then a little shadow of sadness passed across his face. He had watched the swallows and their nests with Margot long ago. How long ago. From that very window; as these children were watching them now.

Margot had just such a small fair head with waves of silken hair. Words of Copper Top's came into his mind. Curious words. "Everything is always there." He wondered. Did the past inevitably become the future, as the future must inevitably become the past? Were they in the end one whole? Why . . . why of course . . .

"Kathleen says tea is ready." Ishtar slipped her hand into his and pulled. "There are scones. Scones, with cream and jam."

"How do you know?"

"Because I visited Kathleen in the kitchen before I came in here. We hugged each other and cried. I believe we cried into the scones! If they taste too salt you will know it is because of our tears. Oh, there is the dear old teapot!"

The Professor poured tea out of it in high glee. The children sat one on each side of him. Kathleen hovered round like some small grey moth, bringing in fresh dainties. The scented logs flamed on the hearth. Birds flew in and out and boldly pecked crumbs from the table. The sunshine and the rain came and went. Curiously the old sense of freedom—of escape—came back to Ishtar. Only now it came as a feeling of glorious carelessness. An absurd desire seized her to run and shout, although she sat there so still with her eyes shining, her face rosy and radiant as a cloud at dawn, and ate scones and cream and jam and looked at Copper Top. He hadn't altered a bit. Only grown up. She liked his smile and his laugh and the quick easy grace with which he moved. She liked his fine capable hands and the clear brown of his skin. She liked the radiant atmosphere that surrounded him. She seemed to catch rays of it. She was not disappointed. He was still the Boy she had dreamed of, the Boy who had meant Freedom.

They went out together when tea was over. The Professor declined to go with them. He watched their swiftly moving figures disappear with kind eyes and his beard curved at an acute angle.

"It's good to be young," he thought. "We are not young long or often enough. And nobody understands how to be young, except the boy."

"We will go and watch for Rainbows," said Copper Top to Ishtar.

They went through the garden into the wood. The air was incredibly sweet. They drew in great breaths of it.

"Oh, isn't it good! Isn't it good!" Ishtar cried.

The sun had struggled once more through the clouds and was driving them eastward in masses of grey and gold, clearing great spaces of vivid blue. Everything sprang into light and song. It was like the first morning.

"Quick!" said Copper Top. "Run, or we shall miss the Rainbow."

They raced along the rain-drenched, sun-washed glade, light and shade glanced everywhere, the scented air stirred the blood to ecstasy, the birds sang in full-throated chorus above the humming harmony of smaller winged things.

"You can run faster!"

"I have trained. At school, and with Don. I love it. . . . Oh, this is up hill! I can't go so fast. . . ."

He turned and moved backwards up the narrow path, smiling down at her.

"Ah, you can go backwards still! I wish I could."

"Why can't you? You haven't tried."

He caught her hands and swung her up and round. She landed lightly on her feet above him facing him.



They both laughed, another glad note in the great chorus. She tried to run backwards, succeeded for a minute, then stumbled and would have fallen but for his hands. He caught her, tossed her lithe body up in the air, and let her fall again on her feet. It was dancing! Glorious dancing! Out with the sun and the air, to the music of all the world.

Then they caught hands and ran side by side, up again, up and up. It was like moving with the wind, she thought.

"Quick!" cried Copper Top again. "Here it comes!"

They scrambled through some bushes. The branches drenched them with a shower-bath of fragrant drops.

"They've grown since I was here last," said Copper Top. "You don't mind?"

"Not a bit!" She laughed as she fought her way with him through the sweet wet things, and then they were out on a ridge of the hill. The woods fell away below them. Tier on tier beneath spring's magic veil, down swept the whole mass of soft and exquisite colour into the valley, then rose again, sinking and soaring, fold after fold, ever fainter and more mysterious, until it met and blended with the driven glory of the clouds.

Even as they looked, the sun burst forth in full triumph, and on the instant a great rainbow flashed into being, spanning the wide valley with a fairy bridge of many colours. Below, the river, like a chain of diamonds, went out towards the sea.

Everywhere was light, colour, sound, and the movement of creative life.

"Copper Top"—Ishtar held his hand close—"it might be the beginning of the world!"

"Don't talk," he answered below his breath. "Look. Watch."

Ishtar waited. The old feeling crept over her that he was seeing things that she did not. "What is it?" she whispered urgently.

"There! One passed over the violets," Copper Top answered softly. "They're everywhere to-day. Now—across the Rainbow. Oh, you beauty!"

"Who? What?" asked Ishtar. "Oh, Copper Top, it's as bad as the squirrels being afraid. I can't see anything—only what's there. The woods and hills, and the river and the rainbow. It might be a bridge for angels, but it isn't."

Copper Top laughed a little. The disappointment that had momentarily clouded his face disappeared.

"How do you know?" he asked. "You believe in angels, don't you? At least they say they do in churches, only their pictures aren't right."

"But no one sees angels now. They only imagine them."

Copper Top frowned. "Don't let's argue. I hate arguing. I see things you don't see. And in your inside you don't think they are there. I'd like you to. Other people don't matter. But if you don't it can't be helped." He looked at her thoughtfully. "I wonder why you don't though."

"I've tried. At least I've tried to keep in with the green world and the creatures," she replied. "I used to sit among the flowers at first and *pray* to see the fairies, but I never did. And I used to love the wild things—*hard*—to try and make them not afraid." She laughed a little at herself, but underneath her laughter she was very much in earnest. "And then it all began to seem silly without you, and when nothing came of it all. But truly, in the back of me, I've *believed* in fairies all the time. Even when I was going in for exams in mathematics!"

"I think you try too hard," pronounced Copper Top. "People are all much too serious, I think. They don't even know how to enjoy themselves. I believe that's what is the matter with everybody. Something's the matter, you know. Please don't be serious, Star. Just listen to the Weaving Song, and there are two blue butterflies among those primroses."

"Can you still call them, Copper Top?"

"It's not so easy as it used to be." A shadow flitted across his face. "I'm afraid I'm getting more human as I grow up."

"But, Copper Top, it's such a great thing to be human."

He shook his head, smiling down at her in his careless way.

"I'm different somehow. I'm more akin to the creatures than to the humans. I can understand what they are up to, but you beat me." He became thoughtful, frowning a little. "I don't understand why humans are so hideously cruel to everything. I don't understand why you are all eternally grubbing after money, or why you set all your values by it. Look at that!" He swept an eloquent hand out towards the Wonder World before them, the magic made by the radiance and the rain. A great heron flapped up from the river, a grey moving shadow among the shadows, then soared on level wings into the light and looked like a pair of blue wings drifting through gold. "How many people come out here to see all that? They like shop windows better. But if you try to imitate all that on the stage, and charge money to see it, everyone goes who can. And they sit in a hot smelly place all packed close together, and make a hideous noise to show that they are pleased. No, I don't understand, and of course neither do you understand me."



"I do. A little," said Ishtar wistfully.

She had taken off her mackintosh for the sun was hot. Now she threw it on the ground and sat down with her knees up and her hands clasped round them and stared out across the valley. She looked small and sweet and very fair, and the sun played in her hair, over her face, and found no flaw.

Copper Top lay down on the close scented turf and looked at her.

"You darling, of course you do," he said.

She brought her eyes back to his and they both laughed.

The little blue butterflies came fluttering from among the primroses and hovered above his head and settled on his hair.

"They have come," Ishtar breathed very softly.

It was very good to have the boy back again. He held out his hand and the tiny frail things flitted on to it.

"You don't really hate human beings, do you?" she asked him. "I don't mean me and 'Dophin and Grannie and Don, but 'People' as 'Dophin calls them?"

"Hate?" Copper Top looked up from his butterflies and met her eyes. There was appeal in them. "Why no, of course I don't. Only when they are cruel. I think I do hate them then. But the other curious things they do they only seem to me dreadfully stupid. I just stare and wonder. Sometimes I wonder no end—What you lose. . . . It's awful! But it doesn't bother me. Everything else in the universe is so ripping . . . and . . . and understandable."

"But," interrupted Ishtar, "man is the most wonderful of all created things."

Copper Top stared. Then he laughed. "So he is and no mistake!" he exclaimed. "But I guess you and I mean different ways."

"Copper Top," began Ishtar in a little rather shy voice. "Do you—do you believe in another life?"

"Another life?" He stared at her wide-eyed. "No, of course I don't."

"Copper Top! Oh, Copper Top. I did think *you* would," she cried, distressed. "I know the—the clever people don't, not really. They only sort of pretend to me because it's the right thing to believe, so they think women ought to believe it! And Don—Don won't discuss it with me. He just turns the conversation and gets away from the point. Of course I know what that means. And, Copper Top dear, I can't bear to think that when I die it will mean the end of me, and I shall never see the people I love and all the beautiful world again—but just be wiped out—finished. It comes over me sometimes that perhaps it *is* like that and I feel so lost and horrible." Her lip gave the little quiver he remembered. "And always I've said to myself then that *you* believed in another life——"

Various changes had moved across Copper Top's face while she had been speaking. Now he laughed a little—was it unkind of him? For a second she felt it was, was hurt, offended. Yet the sound of his laughter was extraordinarily sweet, and it rippled across the valley into the great shafts of sunshine—just as it used to; then he bent forward and looked close into her eyes. His own were very gentle.

"Oh, Star!" he laughed. "How could I know what you meant! You said 'another' life. But it's all one—it can't sort of stop and go out, how could it? It just goes on. . . . Like those rays of light, you know—always. Oh, Star, People can't be so stupid as to think ——" Then he waved a careless hand. "I don't understand—but look here—if we could step out of these

bodies you don't surely think we should be—be wiped out? Of course we shouldn't! We might find ourselves in the body I had once, who knows? It was more useful than this. We could have walked over the rainbow in that one—and gone out and out drifting with the clouds into the heart of the sun, into the heart of the sea, to the farthest star. You would see the fairies then and the great sun angels and the builders. . . .”

He was talking now as one in a dream, his voice only a murmur—part of the song. As he talked Ishtar's fears dropped away like the mists of the night, the golden light all around became a tangible thing, she could feel it run through her veins. She was happy. . . .

Copper Top suddenly woke up out of his dream and sprang to his feet. He held out a hand and pulled her up too.

“Don't be serious,” he said, “I hate being serious. We will go and see the wheat growing in the fields. The rainbow has gone. At least,” he looked at her mischievously, “at least it hasn't gone—it's all there, only you can't see it.”

“Oh, Copper Top,” was all she could say, “I am glad!”

He nodded, and they went through the singing, shining world hand in hand laughing.

Two hours later they found the Professor hard at work in his garden. He greeted them impressively.

“Come here,” he said, and looked mysterious and in procession led them down the path towards the wood.

And there, on a carpet of moss all to itself, stood one small dainty perfect rose-pink daffodil. Rose-pink with a heart of gold.

Copper Top gave a shout. “They've managed it!” he exclaimed. “It's jolly pretty too. It wasn't out this morning.”



"Where did you get it from?" asked Ishtar.

"Well!" said the Professor, delighted. "From—well—intelligent co-operation."

"You crossed things and shook pollen—and things like that," cried Ishtar. "I do think that's all so interesting. Grannie's gardener got a wonderful new *Auricula* somehow by chance. And oh—Copper Top, I have found a profession for you. Growing new sorts of flowers—there'd be a lot of money in it—they give hundreds of pounds for a new bulb or plant—I'm sure you could do it—Oh! do take it up—it would be a lovely profession and I know it would pay."

Copper Top made a little grimace which she did not see because she had gone down on her knees before the new daffodil. She lifted up its fairy bell on to one finger.

"You perfect little gem," she said. "I believe it knows how pleased we are."

Copper Top forgave her, but on her way home she returned to the subject of his profession.

"What *are* you going to be?" she asked. "You are nineteen. You must settle soon, mustn't you?"

"You are worse than 'Dophin," sighed Copper Top. "He keeps on worrying about my going to Cambridge and you want me to settle on a profession—and I—I want to enjoy every single one of the hours as they pass—to get all there is in them—or as much as ever I can—and they are so wonderful, you know—there is such a heap one wants to get at in them—" He stopped and smiled at her. "You are as bad as 'Dophin!"

"I suppose I may take that as a sort of backhanded compliment," she said, smiling back.

"Of course it is a compliment—quite a big important one."

"But what are you going to be?—you must be some-

thing, you know. Every man must. And it's interesting to talk about—at least every other man thinks so—and you'll have to decide some time, won't you?"

"Star, you are as persistent as—as a bluebottle! Let me think a minute." Then he laughed. "I know! I know the very thing. I'll be a vagabond!"

He looked at her as if expecting an immediate and violent attack, but she bubbled over into sudden laughter.

"I think I'd like to be one too—wouldn't it save a lot of bother!"

"I should think it would—no end! Well, if you'll stick to it, I will."

She sighed a little, and shook her head.

"I'd never be allowed! You see you don't understand how it is with all of us. You've just grown up as you liked—or very nearly—but we—we're all of us in chains, chains of the particular life into which we are born, and though perhaps we long sometimes for freedom yet it wants a lot of courage to break them. Sometimes I get a perfect passion to smash them up into little pieces." She looked at him with drawn brows—puzzled—trying to explain what she felt. "And yet—all the time I don't know if I really want to break them after all—even if I wasn't afraid to."

She stopped, for they had reached the gate in the road, the old place where they had always said good-bye.

"I must hurry or I shall be late," she said. "It is nice to have you back, Copper Top."

And Copper Top bent down and kissed her where the little dimple came and went in her cheek, just as he used to do sometimes long ago on rare and wonderful occasions. Just a butterfly kiss. Like the touch of a flower. . . .

Ishtar's face flamed, but her eyes laughed as she ran down the lime avenue towards the Castle. He must not kiss her. Of course he must not. She would have to make that quite clear to him—her mother . . . her mother would be very angry. And Copper Top would be quite equal to kissing her cheerfully before everybody. She must tell him—and he would say, "Why not?" There was a "why not" of course. She would have been very angry if any other boy she knew had kissed her—she ought to have been angry with Copper Top.

These things were very difficult to understand—they seemed to get tangled up somehow. And it would be difficult to make Copper Top understand things! But what a dear he was——

She ran up the steps and into the Hall. The butler was progressing solemnly across it.

"Cartwright," she said breathlessly. "How much time have I got?"

"Six minutes, Miss Helen," said Cartwright, "six and a half, to be quite exact, Miss."



## CHAPTER II

LADY CONDOR was having one of her afternoon At Homes. The sort for which the Invitation Cards have "Music" written in the left hand bottom corner in small letters. But everyone knew that at the Mentmore Castle parties the music would be good. And it was never local talent. It came from London. This did not mean that Lady Condor did not patronise local talent; she engaged it for her London parties whenever possible, and it was an advertisement that Fairbridge talent appreciated. On the other hand the Fairbridge audiences undoubtedly felt that London talent and local talent were very different things. Moreover it was not as if Lady Condor gave only one party a year to which everybody was invited so that nobody felt it was a compliment. The reverse in fact. She was always giving parties, and very enjoyable ones too. And she entertained just as gaily and was just as charming to everyone whether an election was imminent or in the far future.

One of the Family had sat for the Fairbridge Division since time immemorial in the Conservative interest, and it was looked upon, even in disturbingly democratic times, as a safe seat.

"But I haven't the moral courage to start *my* campaign directly an election seems probable," Lady Condor would say to her intimate friends. "Besides, I enjoy entertaining, and the dear things love coming to

our parties. It is of course one of the things we are here for."

"Marion is fundamentally very sound in principle," Mr. Fothersley murmured on these occasions, at which he always assisted.

But now things were very different. No seat indeed was safe. The present Government was tottering to its fall, though hanging grimly, with tooth and claw, to office. An Election might be upon them at any moment. Socialism—even Bolshevism—was rife. Labour had issued a programme that was simply, as Mr. Fothersley said, insane. They all felt that the only safety lay in the return of a strong Conservative Party, but even in their stronghold disquieting things were happening every day.

Mr. Fothersley had arrived at such a point that he was seriously considering whether he could conscientiously continue to take in the *Times*. Even at the Castle party he was visibly not himself.

"Dear Arthur," said Lady Condor, under cover of a brilliant pianoforte solo, "what is the matter? You look like Dam somebody sitting under his sword. A most uncomfortable situation. Why *did* he sit there? I forget!"

"A very apt illustration of the situation of the country to-day," returned Mr. Fothersley in the usual strident whisper that accompanies piano solos. "Has it really become necessary for you to entertain the Pitheys, Marion? She is silent, if impossible. But the man! No wonder the country is——" He waved his little plump hands impotently.

"Most necessary," repeated Lady Condor in the same strident key. "He is shaky in his opinions, very shaky, and we have nothing to offer him. Those little things that used to carry so much weight don't influence a cer-

tain sort of these people. It will not do any good even asking him here, and poor Hawkhurst making himself agreeable—or trying to. Look at him, poor dear.” Lady Condor giggled irrepressibly. “But it might do harm not to ask him, you know. Dear Arthur, do try and not look as if you were taking a dose of Rhubarb Magnesia. If you insist on this being a sort of Marie Antoinette party, under the shadow of the guillotine you know, at any rate let us do the thing properly. I am sure I remember they\* all smiled and looked as if they liked it—— There now! Monsieur Dubloc is finishing up and I haven’t heard a note. Where is my programme—I had it a moment ago—oh there it is—um—ah—oh yes. Lovely, lovely, Monsieur! The last time I heard it played was by Schultz—in Paris—or was it Vienna—but there is something in your rendering ——”

She billowed away with the delighted artist, saying the right thing by a miracle as usual, and Mr. Fothersley gathered himself valiantly together and began one of his little tours among the guests, anchoring for refreshment by his particular crony, Mrs. Roger North, who was looking charmingly pretty in a new frock which he had helped to select, and who agreed forcibly with everything he said about the Pitheys, was equally convinced with himself that the country was going to the dogs, that the lower classes must be taught, and that the only hope for the Empire lay in the restoration of the old Conservative Party to power.

Ishtar and Copper Top were sitting on the sill of one of the big windows. She had her feet inside and he had his feet outside, and they seemed to be enjoying themselves very much.

Lady Condor was making an inspection through her



lorgnettes to see if all her guests were happily arranged. She wondered how long it would be before dear Connie interfered. She was in the tea-room now, but she would certainly come back for Carlotta Johan's song. . . .

"Are they enjoying themselves?" asked Copper Top. He looked like some inquisitive and rather mischievous bird, Ishtar thought, with bright eyes taking everything in, but poised for instant flight if necessary.

"Of course they are," she answered, and then wondered. Were they?

Yes, they must be—they were all talking hard.

Copper Top poked his bright head around the curtain a little further into the room. Bits of conversation detached themselves from the hum and buzz for a minute at a time then fell into it again and were lost. A feathered bonnet and a flowered hat were nid-nodding just below him.

"Of course there are *very* extraordinary people in Fairbridge," said the bonnet.

"But in these democratic days so long as people are pleasant . . ." said the hat.

"Oh!" exclaimed Copper Top, "There is the man who looks like a raven especially from behind—what do you call him?"

"The Archdeacon you mean . . ."

"Yes, that's it. He is looking this way. Don't let him ask me if I know my Catechism, because I don't——"

"I do," said Ishtar, "I think. At least all but my duty to my neighbour . . ."

"I am not one to tittle-tattle," said the hat confidentially, "But when she actually fell down in the street of course one knew . . ."

The rest of the sentence was drowned by a voice that

detached itself from the others, speaking with authority.

"Miss Chromy will be the secretary of course . . ."

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a burst of laughter from the group of ladies surrounding the Archdeacon, in which he joined with great heartiness. He was moving about making himself generally agreeable. Indeed a little remark he had once heard about himself was running pleasantly through his mind: "The life and soul of the party. The life and soul of the party."

"I think I must ask you my riddle, Mrs. Bunbury. But I hope it won't shock you—ha! ha!——"

After she had appreciated the riddle Mrs. Bunbury pointed out the two figures in the window to him.

"Who is the young fellow with Helen?" she asked. "I can't place him at all. Is he one of the family? They seem on intimate terms."

The Archdeacon was interested. He could not place the young fellow either.

A good-looking boy. His wife probably would know. The face seemed familiar. He made his way with a joke and smile here and there towards the "purple vestment and crest of flame" which betokened Mrs. Pinniger's whereabouts.

Mrs. Pinniger watched his approach with pleasure. What a fine looking man he was. And what a charming manner he had.

"Well, dear," she said when he reached her, and beamed.

A footman approached with cups full of tea on a large silver tray, followed by another carrying scones and cakes.

The Archdeacon poured as much cream as would go

into two cups, sugared them liberally, and discussed with his wife which of the many little cakes looked the most inviting.

"All so delicious," said Mrs. Pinniger. "Which are you taking, Mrs. Tummons?"

"I think, my dear," said the Archdeacon, "I ought to ask Mrs. Tummons my riddle, don't you? Or do you think it will shock her? Ha! ha!"

Mrs. Tummons protested, then she insisted, and the Archdeacon asked his riddle. Other surrounding ladies listened; there was much laughter. "The life and soul of the party."

Having thus done his duty by Mrs. Tummons the Archdeacon bent towards his wife, lowered his voice and inclined his head towards the window.

"Who is the young fellow—talking to Helen Moresby—yes, in the window. Not one of the family I don't think, yet his face is familiar."

"I've been asking everybody," Mrs. Pinniger whispered back. "No one seems to know. You might perhaps just . . ."

She looked at the Archdeacon meaningly and he nodded in understanding and agreement. Then he made his way towards the window.

"Let's go," said Copper Top.

"No, no!" Ishtar stopped him. "He knows we've seen him. He caught my eye. Besides, he's really rather an old dear . . ."

"Ah, Miss Helen! I've come across to ask you my riddle."

The Archdeacon shook hands and looked at Copper Top.

Ishtar introduced him.

"Of course!" exclaimed the Archdeacon. "Your face



was quite familiar, I knew. But you young people grow up so quickly. And Professor Godolphin? How is he? Not here to-day, I suppose, amongst we merry-makers?"

Copper Top stared. Merry-makers? Everyone was eating and drinking and talking with their mouths full. The feathered hat was saying "An enormous tumour. Yes. I believe it weighed . . ."

"Do tell us your riddle," Ishtar interposed deftly, and smiled at the Archdeacon. He noticed her likeness to her grandmother.

"You are quite sure I shan't shock you?" he asked, beaming. "Well then, if a young man wants to kiss his young woman——"

They had not noticed that someone was playing the piano, but now a voice rose above the hum and buzz of the many voices and began to silence them. The Archdeacon paused in his riddle and held up his hand to impose silence. It was one of those little ways in which you could help your hostess. Copper Top leant forward again.

"Ah!" he said softly.

The voice was a contralto, rich and very pure in quality, but the first notes quivered. The singer was palpably nervous. Her little plain face looked strained to breaking point. It seemed to Copper Top it might break up into shivers at any moment. Across the closely packed hats sprinkled with bald heads, above the inquisitive faces her eyes met his. He smiled his wide cheerful smile and her voice steadied. She got to the end of the first verse and he called out "Bravo." Ishtar wished he would not do that sort of thing. But after it there was no question as to the success of the song. The little plain girl sang better and better. Ishtar

noticed the poor home-made attempt at an up-to-date frock that she wore. Her strings of dreadful beads. Her cheap patent leather shoes and white lisle-thread stockings. The whole poor little pitiful attempt to be fashionable, and the pathos of it came home to her.

Copper Top was clapping vigorously and calling "Bravo" again. The Archdeacon joined in.

"I don't think much of her voice, dear, do you?" whispered the bonnet shrilly, but she clapped a little feebly. So did the other ladies.

"It must be like singing into a feather bed," said Copper Top. "Poor little thing, I expect it's her first chance too."

He slipped over the window-sill and made his way down the room. People stared at him. He looked vaguely out of place in spite of his easy grace of movement. Who was he? Everyone asked. The Archdeacon moved from group to group, leaving interested gossipers behind him. Copper Top introduced himself to the little group of artists round the piano.

"Thank you ever so much," he said to the girl, "We all enjoyed that."

Then he turned to M. Dubloc, and M. Dubloc, half Frenchman, half Jew, and wholly out of sympathy with his audience, wondered greatly where this radiantly vital lad had sprung from. The next moment he was talking French to him. The whole place seemed suddenly gay. They laughed and chattered together. He knew France, Italy, all the places of the earth where M. Dubloc was at home. They talked of form and colour in music. M. Dubloc told of his troubles of the afternoon. His tenor had failed at the last minute—he had only female voices and himself, pianist. He feared milady would be disappointed with the concert party provided.

Copper Top looked round and an imp of mischief seized him. They were all munching and talking again.

"I'll sing for you," he said, and promptly sat down at the piano.

M. Dubloc suffered an agony.

"Mais, Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ." he stammered in horror. The young man without doubt was only an amateur, most probably bad at that. . . . What would milady think. . . . Copper Top nodded at him with understanding.

"It's all right," he said confidentially.

Then he took possession of the piano and in a moment M. Dubloc knew that it was a master hand upon the keys.

Then he sang, and he had a wonder of a voice. Everyone looked startled, almost afraid. This ecstasy of song that flooded the room—what was it? It began joyously like the morning song of birds, grew soft and tender so that your heart sang with it, then rose and rose on wings of wonder, was carried on away to some lofty region of unspeakable sweetness, exquisitely painfully sweet—if it rose one note higher it would be unbearable——

Ishtar stretched out both her hands. She must stop it—she could not bear it—almost she called out. She slipped her legs over the window-sill, and moved out blindly into the garden with the tears running down her cheeks.

The spring world was radiant in the sunlight. The green life shone. If one could get there—where the song had gone. . . . Life was so infinitely good—so full of magic possibilities. If one had the courage . . . if one was not afraid. . . . There was a sound of quick steps on the gravel pathway. A man came round the corner of the house and almost ran into her.



"Izzy!" he cried. "Why, what's the matter?"

She looked up at him, brushed the tears from her eyes and laughed.

"Don! We did not expect you till the next train! Don't look so fierce!"

"Who has been making you cry?"

"Nobody. It was a song."

Don received the explanation without comment. He disliked music himself, though he sometimes made a manful effort to understand something about the beastly thing for reasons of his own. She was glad to see him. There was something reliable and comfortably substantial about Don. He never sprung surprises on you, or made you suspect a world of wonder close at hand which you could not reach. It was always plain sailing with Don. And he wasn't dull either. He didn't bore you. He was just comfortable and nice and uncommonly good to look at.

"Do you want tea?" she asked. "No? Then let's go as far as the rose-garden and back and tell our news. I'm tired of the party."

She slipped her hand through his arm. She would not tell him it was Copper Top singing that had made her cry. The song was over now. The audience had begun to clap in the half-hearted way Fairbridge audiences did clap. A wonderful voice, but they were not quite sure that they liked the song. Various comments detached themselves from the buzz of conversation.

"The new school of music," said Mrs. Bunbury. "I confess it does not appeal to me."

"Rather—rather—what is the word I want?" murmured Mrs. Pinniger.

"Theatrical," suggested Mrs. Tummons. "What do you think, Miss Chromy?"

"Theatrical? Yes, perhaps you are right." Miss Chromy hesitated. She had thought the song most beautiful, so beautiful that she had forgotten to keep her feet hidden. Her new shoes were painful these first hot days, and she was wearing her shabby ones. Had anyone noticed them?

"Theatrical?" she repeated, "perhaps that *was* it. A little *too* emotional."

"I confess I always like to be able to follow the words," said Mrs. Pinniger. "It was in Italian I think, which I do not understand."

"Perhaps that was just as well," remarked Mrs. Bunbury meaningly, and sniffed. "One knows the style of thing!"

"I wonder what the Archdeacon thought of it," said Mrs. Pinniger.

She half stood up and looked round, and as she did so his voice rose above the rest of the voices. He was asking another lady his riddle. "If a young man wishes to kiss his young woman what newspapers does he mention?" There was much laughter. She felt it was not a moment to disturb him.

"We will ask him presently," she said.

And just at that moment Lady Condor, who felt her parties much as a doctor feels his patient's pulse, said to M. Dubloc:

"I wonder if Miss Mavis would sing 'The Lost Chord' for her next song. It is such a favourite always . . . yes."

"You did not like Monsieur's song, milady?" asked M. Dubloc anxiously.

"Like it! It was wonderful! But it was *too* wonderful. It got through to that funny innermost thing, you know what I mean, that is nearly always asleep. And

of course that is very disturbing. One never knows quite what it would do if it really woke up, does one? It might upset all one's ideas of everything, mightn't it? I always think that's why people are so frightened of—of anything of that sort, you know. But 'The Lost Chord' will put them all comfortably to sleep again. It is so soothing to certain temperaments. Just like 'Land of Hope and Glory' when we are feeling patriotic."

"They eat ices," observed M. Dubloc, eyeing his audience gloomily.

"Yes. After the ices. And you and I, let us go and get a cup of coffee, and you will give me your opinion of the boy's singing. I did not even know he did sing . . ."

M. Dubloc explained how the thing had happened. The coffee was excellent, Lady Condor was most delightful. He opened his heart to her.

"Milady, these audiences such as you have here to-day, they break the heart of the artist. He cannot let himself go, as you say. It gives them fright. There must be no emotion, only the sugared water. The emotion of the Religion even, it gives them fright. And if you turn yourself over and over to move their hearts, in my country they give you a furore, but here they make applause as if it were not correct to do."

"But in London it is better, isn't it?" said Lady Condor sympathetically. "Now you will have a liqueur . . . ?"

"I thank you very much. And the gentleman who sang, of what nationality is he?" asked M. Dubloc.

And it suddenly struck Lady Condor for the first time that they did not even know what Copper Top's nationality was. Presumably he was English, but certainly it was possible that he was not.

"The language of his song, it is one I am not acquainted with," M. Dubloc continued.



"We will ask him," said Lady Condor, and looked round through her glasses to discover Copper Top sitting at a table in the far corner by the conservatory eating peaches with the little frightened singer.

She had confided to him that her real name was Matilda Puffin, but it was not a good professional name so she called herself Muriel Mavis. It was her first engagement and she had nearly died of nervousness, but now another time she would not mind. She lived at Highgate in one room with another girl. The other girl wrote stories for the *Family Herald*. They both worked frightfully hard, and meant to be famous one day, but at present they had only £2 a week between them to live on. It had been very difficult while she was getting her training, but now . . .

"You see getting into M. Dubloc's Concert Party is a big stroke of luck for me," she said. "And coming to a place like this. These peaches are good, aren't they? I suppose they've hot-houses here?"

"Have another," said Copper Top. "Or would you like to come and see the hot-houses?"

She stared at him, round-eyed.

"I'd love it!" she said. "But perhaps I'd better not. I shall be wanted to sing again in a minute. It's awfully nice of you to want me to."

A whole romance had sprung up complete and perfect in her mind. You did hear of these things. The story. Madge was writing now . . . And he *was* being nice to her.

"Do you belong here?" she asked breathlessly, while wonderful visions rose and made the world glorious.

"Oh no!" he said smiling, and it seemed somehow, if it had been possible, that he was glad he didn't.

"Then are you—are you one of us? A professional I mean?" she asked.

Other visions crossed her mind almost equally wonderful. Clara Butt and Kennerly Rumford . . .

He was so handsome too. His eyes were simply lovely.

"No," he answered again, and put another peach on her plate.

"But you could be. You could be famous."

"Yes," said Copper Top carelessly. And he didn't care, it was quite evident he didn't care, not one bit. He was the most extraordinary person she had ever met. But if

. . .

The melody of his song came back to her, mingled curiously with the scent of the Marechal Niel roses from the conservatory, with his smiling beautiful face. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Lady Condor is waving. I think she wants me," Copper Top said. "Will you come too?"

"Oh no," she shrank back and looked frightened. "I couldn't."

"You'd rather stay and eat peaches." He smiled and nodded at her as he went away. It was extraordinary. Everyone was always afraid of something.

Poor little Muriel Mavis, whose real name was Matilda Puffin, watched him go and felt her Castle in the Air come tumbling down all round her. She was a fool. But these sort of things did happen to some lucky people. Quite plain people too. She ate her peach and built the Castle up again. It couldn't come true, but it was lovely building it. And presently she went back to the other room and sang "The Lost Chord," and felt comforted. There was a good time coming some time, somehow, somewhere.

Copper Top made his way down the long room between the little tea-tables, and Lady Condor watched him come. No, he did not look English, but then neither did he look of any other nationality. He only looked different. Perhaps it was his dress; he was wearing an uncommonly well-cut suit of white flannels with a white silk shirt, and of course that made a difference among black coats and grey trousers and stiff collars. Really men's clothes were very ugly—and on a hot day rather ridiculous. How did they bear them in hot weather—only it was so seldom hot—except last year. But what nationality was Copper Top? The Scotch gipsies—but no, of course not. He looked exceptionally well-bred. Rather rarely bred . . .

From what green land of wonder *did* he come? But why green——? What had put that word into her head? Ireland——?

“You wanted me?” asked Copper Top in his simple direct way, standing before her.

Lady Condor came out of her speculations and sat up with extreme suddenness, scattering everything she had in her lap on to the floor.

“Oh dear,” she exclaimed comically, “and I do try so hard not to drop everything about. Tarzan, we want to know the name of your song and who wrote it.”

Copper Top's face wrinkled mischievously for a moment, then “Oh, it's the sort of song that's everywhere,” he said carelessly, and put all her possessions back in her lap.

“You were extemporising, Monsieur!” exclaimed M. Dubloc.

“Well, more or less,” smiled Copper Top. “You see,” he added, answering the bewilderment in the little Frenchman's face, “I seem to hear more than



most people do. There's such a lot of singing in the world."

"But—but—it is a fortune to you—it is Fame!" M. Dubloc waved both hands in the effort to explain to this careless young man the magnitude of the gift which was his. "If you will allow me to arrange a concert for you—in London."

"But I don't sing 'in public' as you call it," said Copper Top, "I don't care for it. It spoils it so. And I don't like People all massed up in lumps. I just sang to-day because you wanted someone to fill up."

"But you have a fortune in your voice," expostulated M. Dubloc, "and you would make a name for yourself—a name. Mon Dieu! It is not a bagatelle, Monsieur—to be like a Caruso, a Chaliapin! It is to be Great. It is to be Rich."

"I don't want to be Great, and I don't want any more money," said Copper Top patiently.

"But what do you want, Tarzan?" asked Lady Con-dor, while M. Dubloc waved hands of amazement. "The fairies have given you all the gifts, and you don't want any of them. What do you want?"

"The fairies' gifts," echoed Copper Top, and laughed. His laughter danced above the buzzy voices. "Why, you can't want what you have, you know."

"Can't you want what you have?" asked Lady Con-dor doubtfully. "I don't believe you can, now I come to think about it. But surely it is one of the greatest interests in life wanting things. What, dear Connie? M. Dubloc is wanted for the accompaniment? We will all go."

She rose and took her daughter-in-law's arm.

M. Dubloc extracted a card from his pocket. "It may be one day you will alter your mind," he said. "If you

do, I shall be very glad to have the honour of bringing your voice before the public. It is a wonderful gift that you have," he added wistfully. Why were such gifts bestowed on those who had no use for them, he wondered, as he hurried after Lady Condor.

Copper Top secreted the card under many others on the card-tray in the hall. It was an extraordinary world. Everyone, even the artists and the poets, were all busy making money, and when they had made it they spent it on such curious things! He wondered where Ishtar was. She had coaxed him to the party; she and Lady Condor and the Professor. What dear things People could be. But what a hideous, wearisome, choking mess they made of everything. He stood in the great porch of the old Castle and meditated flight. The West Highland pack found and greeted him with enthusiasm. Then Ishtar and Don came strolling back from the rose garden. Copper Top looked and loved them. They were a goodly and satisfying couple to look at. But one of the swift shadows that sometimes dimmed his radiant face crossed over it as he looked. Would they too become . . . ? He tossed the thought away. It was like People. Spoiling everything by anticipating sad and unpleasant things. Ishtar's frock was just right. It looked what it should be, the sheath of a flower. He sped with the dogs across the green lawn to greet them, and they met with mirth and laughter under the beech trees, and were exceedingly glad to be together again.

"I can't stay," said Ishtar. "It is nearly six o'clock. I must go in and stand in the hall and say good-bye to everybody. But you won't go." She looked at Copper Top entreatingly. "You won't take Don away. It is so long since we three were together, and we must make plans. We must not waste a minute of our time. Don

is only here for two days on"—she dimpled prettily—"urgent private affairs."

"She wired me to come," explained Don, and grinned.

"All right, Izzy, you go and do your manners. We will have a look round the stables, and wait for you."

"The Lost Chord" was drawing to its triumphant close when Ishtar slipped in at one of the French windows. "It may be that only in Heaven I shall hear that grand Amen."

The applause was really quite cordial, almost enthusiastic.

"A lovely, lovely song I always think," said Mrs. Pinniger. The crumbs fell off her lap in a little shower on the carpet as she rose and looked round for the Archdeacon. It was time to make a move. Ah! there was his handsome head in the doorway. He was talking to Helen Moresby. His fine voice rose above the bustle of departing guests.

"Why, I haven't told you the answer to my riddle yet, Miss Helen. Ha! Ha! Well . . . if you can't guess it . . . No Observers, no Spectators, but as many *Times*," he shook a facetious forefinger in Ishtar's face, "as many *Times* as you like!"

What fun he was, and what a godsend to a hostess at a party.

Mrs. Pinniger said so to him as they drove home through the pleasant spring evening in a hired car.

"A delightful party, dear, and its success largely due, I think, to your efforts."

"Well, well, one is bound to try and help to make things go!" said the Archdeacon, and smiled at her.

"There was one thing, though——" Mrs. Pinniger hesitated. "I know you do not like the repetition of gossip, dear . . . still perhaps . . ."



"Perhaps I had better know," agreed the Archdeacon with resignation. "Well, what is it now?"

"About Professor Godolphin's young . . . Really, dear, I hardly know what to call him! He is not a *ward*, and adopted son at once leads to . . . to just the talk that took place this afternoon."

"Exactly," said the Archdeacon.

"Of course you always said he had been most unwise in giving the boy his own name."

"It was bound to lead to talk," declared the Archdeacon. "Bound to. And what particular form is the talk taking?"

"Everyone is convinced that the young man is the Professor's natural son. Most distressing," said Mrs. Pinniger, and looked distressed. "And there was a good deal of comment on the Condors accepting him in the way they have, and in allowing him to be on intimate terms with their young people, especially Helen."

"There would be," said the Archdeacon. "It is only natural. Dear Lady Condor . . . well, one is never astonished at anything. But I should have thought the Hawkhursts . . ."

"Yes, that is just what I thought. And Helen did make herself rather . . . rather *conspicuous* with the young man. You know somehow, dear, I cannot bring myself to call him young James Godolphin."

"No," said the Archdeacon. "It doesn't seem . . ."

He stopped, and there was a pause. Mrs. Pinniger looked at her husband. He was frowning at the chauffeur's back.

"You know . . ." she began, and stopped too.

"My dear," said the Archdeacon, "let us always believe the best of everybody. Professor Godolphin stated that he found a deserted baby in the forest and adopted it.

We are bound to believe his word until it is proved to be untrue. Make that statement firmly if you hear any more of this talk."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Pinniger. But it was very difficult not to think . . . what did Matthew really think . . . ?

She dared not ask him.

### CHAPTER III

"I DO think it's rotten that you won't learn to play games," said Ishtar.

That she used the present-day all-descriptive adjective of the rising generation showed the intensity of her feelings.

Copper Top did not answer. He was lying flat on his stomach on the edge of the cliff watching the sea-gulls rocking on the still blue water far below. The blue was wonderful. If all colour were translucent . . . It was . . . somewhere . . .

Ishtar was sitting on a big loose chunk of rock, swinging a pair of exquisite feet exquisitely shod. Don lay on the short turf beside her and watched them swing. Near at hand their horses cropped the sweet grass. The larks were singing like things joy-mad in the clear light high above. The wind blew soft and fresh from inland over the new-turned earth, and the springing grass met the salt sweetness of the sea and sang with the sun and the larks.

"You might be first class," said Don lazily. "You're so jolly quick with your eye and hand."

"Copper Top!" Ishtar poked him with the tickling end of a long piece of grass. "Do you hear?"

Copper Top rolled over on to his back and looked up with unwinking eyes into the immense blue above. There were three larks. How the little beggars were singing. It was a wonderful world. . . . He turned and laid his cheek against the warm turf and looked at Ishtar.



"Bluebottle! It is a wicked moment to choose to buzz," he said.

"I won't be called a bluebottle. They are hateful things," protested Ishtar.

"They do worry you," grinned Copper Top. "Why, oh why, should you want me to play games when I don't want to?"

"They would be good for you," said Ishtar priggishly.

Copper Top made a face and addressed his next question to the wide world. "Why are People always trying to make other People do what they think good for them? It is an unpleasant habit."

"If you don't go in for sport, or play games, you feel rather out of it, you know," said Don.

"I expect I was born 'out of it,' " said Copper Top. "Do let's sing or shout or do anything except talk of what is good for us."

Ishtar drew her tickle grass round the curve of his jaw and chin. It was a very beautiful curve, and she went on all down the line of his strong bare throat. Then she smiled very suddenly and sweetly.

"The real truth is, you know, that I want you to play games so that you can play with me," she said softly. "It's no fun if one's friends don't do the same things."

"I won't be intimidated," groaned Copper Top. "How could you expect me to spend an afternoon like this hitting a ball backwards and forwards for hours, trying to prevent someone hitting it back to me?"

"But you ought to do things to please other people," insisted Ishtar.

"Ought to?" asked Copper Top. "I'm not a bit sure that's a good reason for doing things."

Ishtar transferred her attentions with the tickle grass to the top of Don's smooth brown head.

"Anyway Don does things to please me," she said, "or where would I be at all at all, as Kate says."

"Old Don is a humbug," said Copper Top. "He pretends to like things because you do. People are always pretending. That's all right if you can't get the real thing, but when you can, it's just silly."

"Can one get what one really wants?" asked Ishtar wistfully.

"If you know what it is," said Copper Top. "Why not?"

"Let's all say what we want most in the world," exclaimed Ishtar, and there was a little silence.

"Well, we all want the same thing, I suppose," said Ishtar at length. "We all want to have a good time—to be happy——"

"Then," said Copper Top with his little air of careless patience, "why don't you? It's easy to be happy, if that's all you want."

Don and Ishtar looked at him and smiled indulgently. This was one of the foolish things that Copper Top sometimes said. Everyone knows perfectly well that to be happy is one of the most difficult things in the world. A thing everyone pursued and only captured very occasionally for brief periods. Don knew what would make him happy—happy beyond all dreams. His fine clean body shivered as he thought of it. He looked away to the light beyond the blue distances of space, his serene, sweet-tempered face lit by the thought within.

Ishtar's eyes were on the blue distances too. A thought stirred in her mind as in his, but she could give it no name. She could not express it in words. It was only a strange awareness of something she did not understand. A longing and an unrest, an elation that was sweet and exciting, and stirred within her like the flutter of a bird's

wings. She wanted something, but she did not know what it was.

"I do not know what I want most in the world," she declared.

She looked at Don, but he did not look at her. He was making discoveries, and he dared not look at her. She turned to Copper Top, who was lying on his back again with the sun shining full into his unwinking eyes.

"Copper Top," she said, "what do you want most in the world?"

"I want," he spoke dreamily, "I want to weave some of the music stuff into a song. There's heaps of it here. Wonderful stuff."

Ishtar bent forward. "Oh, Copper Top, sing to us," she whispered. "Wait. We'll be very quiet. Sing to us."

And presently Copper Top sat up and sang. And the music of his song was wild as the song of a bird, and sweeter far than any she had ever heard. A mad sweetness that struck some chord of her being and shivered it into pieces, in passionate pain. Yet the song was holy, there were solemn notes in it, and they were the sweetest of all, notes that trod some hidden path, austere, withheld.

Then suddenly the whole song came falling, falling, as from an immense height, from very far off, through the gold and blue and the song of the larks, till it fell all around them in a shower of gay and glad notes, and it seemed to Ishtar they fell into her heart and sang there.

Don stood up with a swift movement and looked across the sea. The song had come perilously near to putting his feelings into words. He felt curiously shy as if something had been unveiled. He did not understand music. It was a queer thing though, how odd it could make you feel.



There was a big steamer drifting shadow-like through the light on the far horizon. Somehow he was pleased to see it.

"A liner," he murmured to himself.

There was a little silence, then Ishtar looked at Copper Top.

"To be able to make a song like that—that is to be happy?" she asked.

"Why yes," he said.

"Copper Top, what did you mean by music stuff?"

"Why, the stuff you make music of."

"Make music of?"

"Well, you must make it of something, mustn't you?"

"I don't know. At least I never thought. Music comes to some people. But I never heard anybody call it stuff before."

"It's an ugly word," said Copper Top. "So is material, and so is matter. But you haven't got any others."

"How do you make music of it?"

"It is music. You must weave it into any pattern you like. The better you can weave, the lovelier patterns you make. I made a lovely one just now," added Copper Top simply. "Why are you digging up that tuft of grass?"

Ishtar desisted. "I don't know, I wasn't thinking. Why do you see things we don't?"

"I don't know why. I wish you did. It would be wonderful, wouldn't it? We could build things together. You can fashion better things together than by yourself."

He sat up and looked at her with eyes that were blue as the sea, as clear and deep and unfathomable. He seemed part of the sun and the sea, and the light that came from both. He was making discoveries too, but he was not in the least shy about it. And suddenly she was afraid. She was glad when Don came back to them

and looked down at her with his little masterful air of protection and possession.

"The wind is getting chilly, Izzy," he said. "You had better not sit here too long. Let's walk to the point of the cliff. One ought to be able to see the French coast there to-day."

He held out a hand to help her up, and Copper Top stood up too and looked over the edge of the cliff to right and left. There was no living soul moving.

"I think I'll go and have a swim," he said, and swung himself over the edge of the cliff. He negotiated the narrow track down its face with the ease and agility of a chamois.

Don and Ishtar made their way along the top. When they reached the Point Copper Top was a speck far out in the immensity of blue.

"By Jove, he can swim," exclaimed Don. "Look where he's got to."

"Do you ever wish you were like him?" asked Ishtar.

"Good heavens no!" replied Don.

"I do sometimes. I think it's because he seems to have the freedom of the world, in a way nobody else has——"

Now Don did not approve of a desire for freedom in a woman. A woman ought to be protected and taken care of. A woman was a thing to be cherished and guided and possessed.

That hot flame which Copper Top's song had lighted burnt up suddenly, a tumult that was sharply, intolerably sweet, rioted within him. A fierce desire to shield her, to hold her, to gather her up inside himself, swept him like a storm.

He was not shy of looking at her any longer. He devoured with his eyes the adorable physical perfection of her, passionately and yet with reverence.

"Izzy," he said, "of course you know I—I"—his strong young voice trembled over the word—"love you. Will you have me?"

Ishtar had known for a long time that this moment would come. Sometimes even she had wondered what he would say when he told her. She had been quite sure, too, that she was in love with him. She was proud of his looks and his dependable, capable character. He was the sort of man of whom any woman would be proud. And he was good to her, just a perfect dear. She had had her dreams of the moment when he would tell her. The wonderful moment that all the poets had so gloriously extolled. She had dreamed of it quite often. So often wondered what it would really be like, and after such dreams when she had seen Don had been exquisitely sweet and shy and daring all at once. And now, when all that wonder kingdom was waiting for her to enter in, even while his close proximity, the quick pant of his breathing, made the blood in her veins tingle with a curious sweet pain, there came rushing over her that old childish desire for Freedom. The great Freedom that lay somewhere beyond the world she knew, beyond the Land of Safety.

She could have cried for it in a passion of despair as she had cried long ago as a little child, when Copper Top had swum out to sea with the sea-birds round him in the track of the sun, and left her behind. He was there now, out in that Freedom—so alive—terribly and wonderfully alive.

"Oh Don, dear Don—I don't know," she said pitifully. "I thought—indeed I thought——"

Then she stopped, for it was as if she had struck the life and light out of his face. It was horrible. She struggled after words to explain. She couldn't bear him



to look like that. There was a dreadful silence. Then he spoke. His lips moved stiffly in his queer-stricken face. He didn't look like Don at all.

"You mean you don't care for me enough?" he asked.

He had always been so sure she cared for him, just as she had been sure he had cared for her. Ever since he could remember it had always been he and she together. There had never been anyone else. That it should not always be so seemed impossible. And she didn't know. Then Ishtar found words.

"I do care for you, Don. I do care for you. It's always been you and I. Always. It isn't that——"

There were tears in her eyes. She wished he would put the old comfortable arm of her childhood round her, and mop them with his handkerchief, and say, "Do stop crying Izzy." Then she could tell him how it was. At any rate the horrid stiff look went out of his face.

"Then what is it?" he asked.

She put her hand on his arm, and drew it back again. He was shaking from head to foot.

"Can't we go on just like we are for a bit longer?" she asked timidly. "Just like we are. I—I couldn't bear to lose you, one little bit, Don."

Don's face broke into a relieved smile. Things were not so desperate after all. He thought he understood. Ishtar wasn't only a beautiful body to him, she was a spiritual thing to be approached as holy ground. He had been sudden and clumsy and beastly cock-sure.

"I'm awfully sorry, Izzy," he said gently. "Of course we will go on as we are, if you like. Would you care to walk a bit further along the cliff?"

Oh, but this was dreadful. It was as if he had suddenly removed himself a hundred miles off.

"No, I wouldn't," she said, and made a rather quiver-

ing attempt at a smile. "I'd like to sit down here, and I'd like you to sit beside me like we used to do when we told secrets. And I want to try and tell you just what it is, if I can. I don't want to feel there's a horrid old wall of misunderstanding between us——"

She sat down on the edge of the cliff and patted the ground beside her. That she was being abominably cruel never entered into her head. That the only fair thing to Don was to let him alone never occurred to her. She had been brought up as far as possible in the complete ignorance of which Lady Hawkhurst approved. What she would have liked at the moment was for Don to put that comfortable arm round her, mop her wet eyes with his handkerchief and say, "For goodness sake don't begin to cry, Izzy."

But Don sat down at a respectful distance and pulled up tufts of the short grass and flung them into the sea.

"You're not cross, are you, Don?" she asked.

"No," said Don. "Fire ahead, Izzy."

"You see, it's like this," she began desperately. "I've got a kink in me somewhere. I'm not true to type, Don. I've felt it ever since I was small—only I didn't understand then. I've always had a feeling as if I were shut up, as if I were in a shell. I don't mind it as a rule, it's a comfortable shell enough. I don't know that I *really* want to get out of it. It would be much easier if I did. But sometimes—not very often—but sometimes—I do want to get out desperately. I feel as if we were all only playing at life just as—as a chrysalis might be playing at it—inside his cocoon. Thinking he was alive, you know. And occupied with all sorts of things that aren't real at all—only make-believes. It's a horrible feeling when it comes. I used to get it when I went to bed when I was a child. It isn't so bad now, but it used to

be awful then. You see I was brought up to bottle up everything and do as I was told—I don't think people realise how children suffer. And I remember when I heard about Copper Top and his life out in the woods I longed to get out of my life into his. He used to stand to me in some odd way for Freedom. Only I was afraid of it. I couldn't have stayed out in the great forest all alone like he did. I should have cried for Nanny and the nursery fire and lights and my cot, and knowing I was safe in my little shell. But when the sun shone and I was with him, I longed for his freedom—he seemed free of all the world. I felt like a chrysalis just when he was going to crack up his back. But always I knew I was afraid to crack. To be out all alone with everything. And just now when—when you asked me to marry you, Don, I felt one of those longings for the Freedom that I feel lies outside our little shell. I wanted it desperately—it's ever so desperate the want when it comes—and so I didn't know—oh Don, do you understand a little bit?"

She poured it all out swiftly, hurriedly, with little breaks here and there. Don followed her with difficulty.

"But you would not be less free with me, dear," he said. "You would be much freer really. I—I'd let you do pretty well what you liked."

"Oh, Don, but don't you see?" She was half laughing now. "*You* are like the nursery fire and the cot and the safe feeling. I'd be settling myself into my chrysalis for good and all. And it's such a dear, warm, comfortable chrysalis. I want it too. But Don, if this life of ours isn't real at all—is only make-believe—if we're only running round in a little circle doing the things because we've always done them, and not doing things just for the same



reason. And all of us living and not knowing what life is—when you think about it at all, really think, Don—doesn't it make you feel lost and horrible and—oh—and want to get out?"

"No," said Don, looking at her with puzzled eyes. The violence of the storm of passion which had swept over him was subsiding, but curiously it seemed to have carried him like some great wave to a different standpoint. He too was conscious of an urge within towards something bigger than he could grasp. Perhaps what Ishtar was trying to describe was the same sort of thing. He tried to get the chaos in which his thoughts rose up and then were lost again, into something like order. And while he struggled with it, hunted about too for words with which to answer Ishtar, to tell her that at least if he did not understand he had some idea of what she was trying to explain, Ishtar looked at him. Looked at his lithe, well-knit figure, six foot of splendid manhood, at his crisp, close-cut hair, at his straight profile bent above the grass he was still plucking up by handfuls and throwing with little impatient jerks over the cliff. Nearly, very nearly, she bent forward and gave herself to him for good and all. Only recurring again and again, not as from without, but within herself so it seemed, she heard the slender solemn theme that had run through the sweet madness of Copper Top's song. The theme which had followed some hidden path—austere—withheld—untrod—it called to her—called like the Pipes of Pan at the Gates of Dawn——

"For goodness sake don't cry, Izzy," said Don at last, and she found the tears had welled over and were running down her face. She mopped them up for herself hurriedly, ashamed.

"It's all right, dear," Don went on. "I think I understand. At any rate this particular part of the contents of the chrysalis isn't playing at things. It's real enough that I love you. Good God, Izzy, I'd be cut into pieces for you. . . ."

"Oh Don, I know—I know. And I do love you—I do. If you will only wait . . ."

"While I'm alive—" said Don, and choked on the words.

She slipped her hand into his, and he held it quite gently in his strong grip as he had often held it when they were children, and she was frightened. But he went white under his tan. Izzy did not know. Of course she did not know.

He set his teeth and looked out over the sea. Any sign of Copper Top had disappeared, but presently his voice called to them from below. Don dropped Ishtar's hand and looked over the cliff.

"There's a nest full of young larks here," Copper Top called up to him. "The jolliest little beggars you ever saw. Just fledged. Can you two get down here? They're too young to be frightened of you."

He was on a small plateau tucked away in a sheltered spot where the turf and thyme grew together. Ishtar joined Don and peered over the cliff. "I've never seen a lark's nest. I'd love to."

"Come round to the other side, to the right. There's a fairly easy track. Yes, that way. No, more to the right," directed Copper Top.

They scrambled down, laughing and calling to one another. Things grew comfortable and happy again as they scrambled. Finally they tumbled more or less dishevelled on to the plateau.

"I shall never get back," panted Ishtar as she landed. "But oh, what a lovely little cubby hole!"

She looked round. They seemed shut into a place of quiet warmth and brightness. Little flowers were blossoming in the crannies of the cliff all around and above them. There was no land. Only the sea and the sky and this nest, hung in space.

"What a place to have a nest," she said. "Oh, the clever things!"

Copper Top showed her the five speckle-breasted baby larks, seemingly tucked into a round hole in the turf. They looked with bright eyes, and opened their mouths promptly. Fear was not yet, only curiosity and a demand for food.

"The little blessed dears!" murmured Ishtar.

"Jolly pretty, aren't they?" said Don, and picked one out of the nest.

It sat in the palm of his hand and continued to demand food with unwinking persistence.

"You mustn't stay," said Copper Top. "It will give the old birds a bad fright if they find you here. But I knew you'd like to see them. Go up first, Don—then Star—and I'll follow. She'll be all right then."

"I'd like to stay here. It's the loveliest place," said Ishtar. "Look, there's a tiny butterfly. Only one would want to be able to fly—then——"

Copper Top laughed. He took her hand, turned it over, and dropped a butterfly kiss into the palm. Then he doubled her fingers over it with absurd and exaggerated care.

"Never mind—there's a present for you," he said. "I will learn to play tennis."

When she got home Ishtar went up to her bedroom, the bedroom that had always been hers, where on every



fine night the star above the tallest tree-top shone in at the window. She rang for Rose to take off her habit and riding-boots, and brush her hair.

"Mademoiselle is tired," said Rose sympathetically.

"No," said Ishtar, "I'm much worse than tired, Rose. I don't know what I want."

"But," objected Rose, "Mademoiselle has everything."

Ishtar laughed and sighed both at once.

"Ah, Rose, but suppose I want the moon! There! that will do. Come back in time to dress me for dinner."

After Rose had left her, she sat down and tried to put things straight in her mind, but she could not put them straight. Indeed to get them straight was no simple matter, for she was torn between two desires without understanding either of them.

When she was dressed she went in to see her grandmother. Lady Condor had just arrived at the stage when she put on her jewels.

"The pink topaz, I think, Mullins," she was saying as Ishtar entered.

"Oh, let me choose for you like I used to, Grannie," she exclaimed. "I'd love to."

Lady Condor looked at her. "Well, you've chosen very well for yourself, my dear," she said. "I like that frock. It's 'real cunning,' as the Americans say."

But her dear shrewd eyes were taking in more than the frock. "See what you can do with your old Grannie. Mullins, don't wait. Miss Helen will do anything more I want."

"I love your frock, too, Grannie, and you look a darling, but I don't think I fancy the pink topaz with it. Let me have a look now."

She was standing in front of the jewel cabinet so that

her profile only was turned towards her grandmother while she drew out one drawer after another.

"We had a gorgeous ride this afternoon, Grannie. And we found a lark's nest, at least Copper Top did."

Lady Condor murmured something unintelligible. She was putting on some lip salve.

"Grannie, how do you know if you're in love with somebody or not?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Condor. Then she let her stick of salve fall on the floor. "My dear, I've dropped my lip salve. Thank you, darling. How does one know—? Well, one . . . um . . . well . . ."

"How did *you* know yourself, Grannie? Because you were in love with Grandpa, weren't you?" Ishtar had gone back to the cabinet and was apparently deeply absorbed with its contents.

"Good gracious, yes!" exclaimed Lady Condor. "I was crazy about him. Quite crazy. That's it, my dear! It's a madness. You can't mistake it when it comes because that's what it is. I would have walked bare foot round the world after him. I would have scrubbed and washed and cooked and—and fed pigs for him, though I should have done them all very badly, I'm afraid, just for the mere satisfaction of being near him, you understand. Oh, a madness, my dear!"

"But all people are not alike, Grannie."

"No, my dear, that is true—but all people fall in love." Lady Condor powdered her nose again though it was already well powdered, then she removed what she had put on with a fine pocket-handkerchief. During this process she thought furiously.

"There are three things that happen to everybody," she said, looking at her nose sideways with the hand-glass. "Birth, falling in love, and Death. It is all part

of Nature's determination that we should all go on, I think—continuing the—the thingummy, you know.”

She put down the hand-glass and slid thankfully, as it were, away from the subject.

“But they don't fall in love in the same way—no—I remember——”

She fell into profound thought and smiled.

“Were you ever in love with anybody else or only Grandpa?” asked Ishtar. She had left the jewel cabinet now, and was standing in her old place by the dressing-table asking questions with the same solemn eyes as the child had done.

“Yes, lots of times, dear. Why, I very nearly got engaged to Cousin James,” she giggled irrepressibly. “But when your grandfather came——” She waved two plump jewelled hands expressively.

“Then you wouldn't advise anyone to get engaged unless they feel they can—can follow bare foot—and—and—just like that, Grannie?”

“It's safest!” said Lady Condor, succinctly for once. “You see,” she added, “there's nothing in the world that requires so much making the best of things you don't like as marriage, if it's to be a success at all. The trial your grandfather has been to me at times, and that's nothing to the trial I must have been to him! And I believe I've got worse, not better. There isn't a peculiarity I ever had that I haven't still got . . . still got . . . what is the word I want, my dear?—accentuated—yes. And of course”—Lady Condor contemplated herself thoughtfully in the glass—“I am peculiar.”

“Yes, darling,” said Ishtar. “But it would be dreadful if you weren't. I don't know what I'd do. And I suppose what you advise is that one had better not marry unless one just can't help it.”



"No, dear, I don't advise. I don't like advising. It's always a wonder to me how fond people are of it. Advising, I mean. Not taking it. No! Nobody does take it as a rule, so I never can think why they are always asking for it. I don't mean you, darling, of course. And to marry at the best is to take what my poor dear Ricky used to call 'a deuce of a risk.' A deuce of a risk," she repeated, and powdered her nose once more.

"All the same a girl has to marry," said Ishtar.

"Of course she has, and a man too," exclaimed Lady Condor with animation. "Why, look at Arthur Fotherstley! He's becoming a regular old maid. Like they used to be, you know. The new old maid, of course, is different. Rather dreadfully capable and masterful, I think. Look at Bertha Blenkinsop. We have just made her the Secretary of the Women's Conservative Association, and— But where were we? Oh yes—about girls marrying. Your dear mother would be dreadfully upset if you did not. Besides"—Lady Condor's face grew a little wistful but amazingly sweet. Her eyes sought two miniatures standing among the innumerable paraphernalia on her dressing-table. She finished her sentence below her breath. "It is a wonderful thing to be the mother of a son."

Lady Condor wore the pink topaz after all, and was rather distraught all through dinner. Had she been any use at all to the child? It was very difficult to know what to say. Probably, too, dear Connie had told her nothing—nothing whatever, she would not think it nice. It wasn't very nice, of course. She thought of things she might have said all through dinner, and used even more confused metaphors than usual.

After dinner they went on to a small dance for young

people given by Mr. Fothersley. He liked these little entertainments, and gave them frequently. Indeed, he took a considerable pride in showing how these things should be done.

He always asked the fathers and mothers as well as the young people, and the supper was beyond question. Fox-trots and bunny-hugs were not even mentioned, and Mr. Fothersley occasionally took the floor in an old-fashioned polka himself.

"Where is Copper Top?" asked Lady Condor, looking round after the third dance through her glasses. "I haven't seen him yet. Or couldn't you get him to come?"

"I did not ask him," said Mr. Fothersley a little stiffly. "I have never approved, as you know, of treating the boy like one of Us, and I approve still less now he is grown up."

"Grown up!" repeated Lady Condor. "Yes, I suppose he is. They do it so suddenly, don't they? What is it, Arthur?"

Mr. Fothersley looked round him. "What is what?" he asked.

"The something important you want to say to me. I always know when you scratch your chin like that that you have something important to say. I hope it is something interesting. Now sit down and let us be comfortable over it."

She patted the chair beside her, and Mr. Fothersley sat down.

"No, Marion," he said, "it is not interesting—not in the way you mean. It is disturbing. I gather there was a good deal of talk after your At Home the other day—undesirable talk I consider about James' protégé. . . . The general conclusion seems to be that he is really—um—er—James' natural son."

"Well!" exclaimed Lady Condor. "What else did James expect? The only wonder is they have not said it before."

"Possibly they have, but it did not come to my ears," said Mr. Fothersley. "However, that sort of talk is, of course, purely James' affair. There is far worse behind——"

"You do not mean it is true!" Lady Condor was really agitated. "But of course it is not—James would never——" All sorts of amazing possibilities and impossibilities crowded into her mind.

"I do not know if it is true or not. I should think probably *not*," said Mr. Fothersley. "What has distressed and disturbed me——"

"Arthur, you are thoroughly enjoying yourself."

"I am both distressed and disturbed," repeated Mr. Fothersley with dignity. He gathered himself together for the *bonne bouche*. "As you will understand when I tell you they are coupling Helen's name with the young man's."

"Arthur!" The sparkle of anticipated enjoyment died out of Lady Condor's eye. She looked comically disappointed, as well as disturbed. "But what possible reason—he has only just come back——"

She was guiltily and acutely aware of long days spent by Ishtar up at the Little House . . . probably alone in the forest with Copper Top. But who could have known? Had anyone seen? "What are they saying?" she demanded.

"She made herself rather conspicuous with him, if you remember, at your At Home sitting in the window," said Mr. Fothersley. "I wondered at the time that Connie allowed it."

"She was in one of the other rooms," murmured Lady



Condor. "I do hope she will not hear of this ridiculous talk."

"Of course that was quite enough to start everybody talking," Mr. Fothersley continued. "Mrs. Bunbury was there and Miss Goble——"

"I never liked that woman," interposed Lady Condor.

"I do not know if there has been any other incident to cause gossip."

"Nor do I!" said Lady Condor. "But I have been an old fool. I'm sure—at least I hope"—she remembered Ishtar's questions—"there is no truth whatever in it, but of course there might have been. I'm afraid we've all been taking it too much for granted perhaps that Ishtar will marry Don MacClean."

"A most suitable match. Most . . ."

"Of course it is. The only question is, is it too suitable? Arthur, where are my glasses? I dropped them off my nose, I think, just now when you dropped your bomb—and it really is a bomb—just when I thought too you had something really amusing—oh, there they are—but where were we? I don't care what people are saying, they will say anything about nothing—but if it were true it would not do at all, not at all. Hawkhurst and Connie would never hear of it. If only he were James' son—his proper son, I mean——"

"Even then he would be no match for Helen," said Mr. Fothersley. He disliked nicknames and never used them. "And as it is . . ." Words failed him.

"Dear Arthur, I suppose you have been right all the time. How horrid of you!"

"I must own I did not foresee this probability, Marion," owned Mr. Fothersley handsomely. "But I dislike intimacies when you don't know people's antecedents, because what have you to go upon? Blood always——"

"Yes, Arthur. I remember I talked just like that to James when he found the boy. But all the same I can't help being fond of him now he's there."

"He is distinctively attractive," said Mr. Fothersley, regretfully. "That—that," he repeated impressively, "is the danger."

Yes. And long days in the woods. In the spring time. A most dangerous time. Yes. Tennyson. Lady Condor's mind flew about, and she wondered and wondered again how she could have been so foolish.

"It was resurrecting all the old Primrose League paraphernalia," she said with apparent inconsequence. "And it never will resurrect, you know, never! They are all quarrelling already and writing letters to the papers about each other. We must think of something new. And there were all those Committee Meetings to arrange something for the poor Irish refugees. But my dear, I do not believe there is anything really in it—anything whatever," she repeated firmly. Then she wavered. "Poor dear Connie!" she exclaimed. "She would have a fit!"

Connie came into Lady Condor's room that night. She often did after parties because gowns were fastening up the back again, and Lady Condor did not like to keep her maid up. To-night, while Connie was unhooking, she said:

"Don proposed to Ishtar to-day."

"She—she hasn't refused him?" asked Lady Condor, anxiously screwing her head over her left shoulder in a vain attempt to catch sight of her daughter-in-law's face. "Never mind doing that!"

"I've just finished," said Lady Hawkhurst with irritating calm, while Lady Condor's mind literally galloped about. Was it at the dance, after their talk together?

Had she been unwise? But one must tell the truth—sometimes.

“I noticed his manner at dinner,” Lady Hawkhurst continued, slipping the gown forward over Lady Condor’s still beautiful shoulders. “And I asked her afterwards if anything had happened. She seems to have suggested that he should wait. I could not get much out of her. She is curious, you know, sometimes, and of course one does not want to influence her too much, or hurry her —”

Lady Hawkhurst looked at her mother-in-law inquiringly.

“No,” murmured Lady Condor. “But I wish——”

“So do I,” replied Lady Hawkhurst. “I always feel a little anxious about Ishtar. I’ve never felt that I understand her like I do the boys. You know how carefully she has been brought up, and this evening she said she thought a woman ought to have two husbands, one when she wanted adventures, and one when she wanted to feel safe! I can’t think where she gets these ideas from! And I do hate the type of woman who wants to have adventures.”

Lady Condor hid a smile while she unhooked her corsets. Dear Connie must have irritated Ishtar very much before she said that to her. It was just the sort of thing that Ricky would have said. But Connie was quite right, these ideas were not at all desirable in a girl.

“I can’t think where she gets it from,” complained Lady Hawkhurst.

“No,” murmured Lady Condor. (Poor dear Condor. How utterly unable he had been, in his youth, to resist an adventure. It did sometimes come out in the women ——) “But I don’t think, my dear,” she went on briskly, “that Ishtar means the sort of adventure you are think-



ing of. The child means star hunting or trying to find the moon. That sort of thing."

"I dislike that too," said Lady Hawkhurst. "Of course the child might marry anybody. Young Rysdale was mad about her. But one has always looked upon it as more or less settled that she and Don——"

"And so they will," said Lady Condor comfortingly. "She's so used to him as a friend, she wants a little time to get used to him as a lover, that's all it is."

She was relieved. If Ishtar had fallen in love with Copper Top she most certainly would not have suggested to Don that he should wait.

All the same Lady Condor had had a fright. Those woods in May and June, and the Hawkhursts coming to the Castle every week-end, and Don away at Cambridge. Don who had got to wait. Lady Condor sat and thought until the dawn was at hand. Then she made up her mind with the extreme suddenness characteristic of her.

Regardless of the hour, she went into her husband's room and switched on the electric light. It fell full on his sleeping face and on her own reflection in the long mirror opposite the door. She looked at both and sighed. Yes, it was difficult to keep the torch of Romance alight when one got past middle age. But the real man, whom she knew now as she had never done in those glorious glamour days when they were young, the real man, who had been such a trial, what a darling he was. She watched him sleeping with different eyes, but they were still the eyes of love.

"Tony," she said and tickled him. "Wake up. I want to talk to you."

"What the devil," murmured Lord Condor. Then he sat up and blinked. "Good Heavens! Marion!" He

blinked again. "What on earth are you Lady Macbething at this hour for?"

Lady Condor giggled. "Tony, you know that trip to Canada we've been promising ourselves before Lanchester's time there is up? I want to go now. I mean as soon as ever we can get off. A really nice trip. Not a hurried scratch round. We will take Ishtar with us, and Hawkhurst and Connie can nurse the constituency. We do overshadow them, you know. I've thought it all out. Just tell me if you can go. I just want to know that, and then you can go to sleep again, darling."

"Upon my word," said Lord Condor. "Upon my word!" Then he began to laugh. "Paddy, I believe I like the idea. We'll settle dates to-morrow."

"He is," said his wife as she paddled back to her room, "a perfect gem of a husband."

Other men would have asked why and what and all the other worrying things beginning with W's. And it would have been so perfectly impossible to explain the matter to any man.

She climbed voluminously into bed, went to sleep happily, dreamed that she was being married to Mr. Fothersley in Westminster Abbey, and woke up exclaiming, "What *will* Condor say?"

The idea of the trip to Canada caught on. The more Lady Condor thought of it the better pleased she was with it. So was Lord Condor. So, and in a far greater degree was Ishtar. For her mother, with the best intentions in the world, had succeeded in thoroughly frightening her. Lady Hawkhurst herself did not know what to think. Dearly as she loved her mother-in-law she was not quite sure that she was the best companion for Ishtar at the moment.

"You know your mother can't help always liking every-

body to have what they want," she said, when talking it over with Lord Hawkhurst. "I think it's what makes her such a dear. But people don't always want what is best for them. And, of course, however long she thinks about it, Ishtar cannot do better than marry Don Mac-Clean."

"She's only a child," said Lord Hawkhurst. "There's no hurry about it that I see."

The idea that Ishtar was old enough to be married had come to him as a surprise, rather as a shock. She was absurdly young. He did not feel particularly keen on her being engaged even yet. Long engagements, too, were bad things.

"What does Mother think about it?" he asked.

"Oh, she agrees with me. She thinks Ishtar could not do better. She was quite disappointed, I think, when I told her what had happened."

"Very well, then. I think the trip's a good idea myself. The child wants to go—she'll enjoy it. And it will give her time to make up her mind without being bothered."

Indeed, the more Lord Hawkhurst thought of the idea the more pleased he was with it too.

And all of them would have thought the trip still more desirable had they known of the long days in the forest, or of the talk in the neighborhood. But Lady Condor kept her guilty secret to herself, and by the middle of May the party had sailed for New York. Don Mac-Clean ran down to Liverpool to see them off. He also had a heart-to-heart talk with Lady Condor.

"I don't want to worry Izzy, you know," he said when it was over.

"No," said Lady Condor. She beamed up into his square, sweet-tempered face, which was looking so des-



perately earnest, and felt glad that she liked him quite as well as Copper Top, apart from his long line of ancestors, his great castle in the north, and the two hundred thousand pounds his father had left him. "No, my dear boy, of course that would never do—you are very wise. I will wire. Now let me write down the dates—where is my little calendar—in that bag—yes."

"You—you won't lose it?" asked Don. His eyes twinkled in spite of anxiety.

"It is a most remarkable thing," said Lady Condor confidentially, "but although I drop everything all over the place, and they hide themselves in the most extraordinary way, I never really lose anything—not for good, I mean. And in any case—let me see what is the date—the 4th of June. Yes—what happens on the 4th of June—something important—yes, on the 4th of June Mullins will have orders to say to me, 'Wire to Cambridge.' "

She looked at him triumphantly.

"It is important," said Don, and laughed. "But don't wire if you think she'd rather I didn't come. It's awfully good of you, Aunt Marion."

Lady Condor did not forget, and duly, during May week, which at Cambridge takes place in June, Don received a cable from her containing the one word, "Come." Nor did she fail to appear even more surprised than her husband or Ishtar when, one morning during breakfast-time at the Banff Hotel in the Rockies, Don MacClean walked in and explained that it had struck him as a good way to spend the long vacation.

And Ishtar, somewhat unexpectedly, found him exactly the Don she had always known. Her slave, but a matter-of-fact slave, who could on occasion be rather more than a little masterful. He added enormously to the enjoyment of the trip. Until he arrived it had been a little

disappointing. Everyone was sweet to her, but she missed—what did she miss? Was it Don or was it Copper Top, or was it not rather both of them?

Lady Condor's guilty secret lay so lightly upon her soul that she told her husband all about it.

"Tarzan," exclaimed Lord Condor. "Well, upon my word, Paddy, I should never have thought of it myself! I never look on him as ordinary flesh and blood. He's made of the elements."

"But one of them is fire," remarked Lady Condor, sagely.

"H'm," said Lord Condor. "Well, just as well to be careful! One never knows. As for Don MacClean, he generally gets what he wants I've noticed. Just like him, following us out here. Well, she can't do better."

## CHAPTER IV

DR. CHARLES PENDLEBURY spent his long vacation with the Professor and Copper Top. He enjoyed himself very much. The food was excellent; he nearly decided to become a vegetarian, moreover it agreed with him. Never had his brain worked so clearly nor had he relished with greater satisfaction what a first-class instrument it was. He had not to consider clothes. It was an enormous rest. He went about looking exactly like a burglar's assistant in an old suit which he declared he had kept for fifteen years for just such an occasion. He slept for hours in the sunshine, and announced that he had never had enough sleep before. He smoked prodigiously, and argued even more prodigiously, with the Professor, until Copper Top intervened with laughter and explained that they were talking more nonsense than had ever been put together at one time before. He and the boy were supposed to work together every morning. They certainly played the piano a good deal. Pendlebury also taught Copper Top to play a fair game of tennis down on the Castle courts. Still they must have worked a little because Copper Top passed his examination at Cambridge.

Pendlebury declared that he must have thrown a magic spell—a black-magic spell—over the examiners.

At any rate he passed, and went up to Cambridge. Found her gorgeously arrayed in her October robe of



gold and crimson, found her old streets and colleges full of young faces on whom discontent and satiety and worry had not yet set their hall-mark. Found in her the shining of youth and the sound of laughter.

"I will stay," he said to the Professor. "At least for a bit." He liked to please his 'Dophin when 'Dophin did not demand things altogether too utterly absurd. Also, through the years, wonder had grown up in the boy, and a certain interest in the ways of men. How did they endure the solemn stagnation of their lives? What induced them to follow with such zest, such strangely uninviting pursuits? What imp of darkness persuaded them to play such queer tricks? To fight each other over things of no importance, oblivious to the wonder and glory of the things that mattered and which need no fighting over. What madness drove them to bind themselves hand and foot by strange laws and customs, so that they crawled captives to their own follies, and knew neither joy nor freedom. How did they bear it—day after day—year after year? Copper Top peered at them out of his own fair world and wondered. He began to be interested.

"I will stay," he said. "At least for a bit."

The Professor had found him rooms high up in the sun and air, and where from the windows you could see across the tree-tops to the water meadows and the far low hills, and he had made unholy compacts, subversive of law and order, with the landlady, who, however, in any case became almost as foolish as himself over the Boy, from the moment he arrived with Little Wolf fiercely snarling at all comers under one arm and a pert-tailed, excited terrier under the other. She took the dogs in, against all rules, and bore with them, and she let Copper Top go his own way and no one was the wiser.

It is certain that if Copper Top had lived in College he would not have stayed much longer than he had stayed at school. He was entered at Trinity, where Don MacClean was in his third, and Richard Moresby in his second year, both eager and willing to take Copper Top under their wing, so far as he would allow of it.

Richard Moresby had turned out what is generally known as "a good chap, but a bit of a fool," and as a political career was marked out for him it did not seem necessary that he should do more than take a decent degree. For the rest he played lawn tennis very well and tried to speak at the Union. Don MacClean's friendship was of greater value to Copper Top, and helped him by its mere existence, for he was a double Blue and a very big man indeed.

In this capacity he had scored for Richard his one big success at the Union. The proposition ran "that a Blue is of more value to a man than a First." The opposition were the better debaters, and the day seemed lost when Richard rose for the proposer's final. MacClean had just come in, and was standing inside the doorway, tall and straight and limber as a young sapling, and, as all knew, with a right clean record that men respected behind his splendid physical personality. Nearing the end of his peroration Richard caught sight of him, and at the same time of his inspiration. "Look at MacClean!" he cried. The house cheered like mad, and the voting went for the Blues.

Copper Top wondered how any man could be foolish enough to spend the golden treasure of youth on either pursuit, but he was thankful that his friend was an athlete rather than a scholar. He would have disliked visions of Don or Richard slowly fossilising into the strange shapes acquired by learned Dons who had made a study

of the Pyramids, or the Middle Ages, or something equally dead and dusty, the main interest of their lives.

Trinity first became aware of his existence in MacClean's rooms, playing the piano and singing amazingly well. He speedily became popular.

"He is like a Pint of the Boy," someone suggested, and the Boy he became among MacClean's and Moresby's immediate set.

He did no more work than was absolutely necessary, and that is very little indeed, but he had to sit through a certain number of meals that to him were hideous with noise and smell, and also through a certain number of lectures on subjects which had no connection whatever with life as Copper Top understood it.

But these people were all alike, he thought. What were they doing? What were they after? Where were they trying to get to? He sat and looked at them and marvelled.

His first plunge into notoriety was for assault with violence, on a respectable gentleman, a retired cheesemonger, who possessed a charming house on a back water of the Cam. He also possessed a thrush in a cage. Copper Top, idling with the river one sunshiny November afternoon, caught sight of his brother, dull-eyed and miserable, with mournful unused wings, being placed in his cage outside the respectable gentleman's library window, and promptly "trespassed," as the respectable gentleman said in Court, "in the most impertinent manner" and demanded the instant release of the captive. The respectable gentleman informed him that he would "see him damned first." He owned to the language, but pleaded grave justification.

On that, Copper Top picked him up bodily, dropped him into the back water and let the thrush fly. It flew



over him as he struggled impotently, waist-high in weeds when more language occurred. Copper Top described it it Court as "most horrible sounds."

"At least you do not deny that you knew the bird was this gentleman's property?" asked the plaintiff counsel.

"Of course I do!" said Copper Top, and looked at him in mild surprise.

Counsel looked at the Magistrate as one who says, "Well, there you are!"

"The cage was in this gentleman's private grounds," the Magistrate reminded Copper Top.

"But the thrush belongs to himself. His life is his own," said Copper Top. "If you take it and shut it up, it does not make it yours."

He was obviously sincere. He was also really very delightful to look at. The Bench was lenient. As a matter of fact they did not think the boy quite sane, and gave him the option of a fine. The Dean had Copper Top up and gave him some good advice. He agreed that Copper Top had a right to his own opinion with regard to the rights of thrushes, but he had no right to put another gentleman into the river.

Copper Top apologised, and the Dean had a chat with Pendlebury.

"Brought up by Godolphin, *James* Godolphin!" he exclaimed. "My dear fellow, it would account for anything. An able man, but misguided. You read his last book \_\_\_\_\_"

"He's writing another—worse!" said Pendlebury.

"You don't say so. Dear! Dear!"

"There isn't one sacred monument of civilisation that he has not desecrated."

"Dear! Dear!" repeated the Dean. "A pity! A great pity!"

Pendlebury departed before he began to giggle. He went to dine with Copper Top that night. He liked dining with the boy in his big bare room, where the flames from the log fire danced and gleamed, and the shining table glowed with the rich colour of fruits, yellow pears and crimson plums, the red-gold of pineapple, and the purple and pale green of grapes. And the boy himself reminded him more than ever of the Greek Hermes in the Capitol. And was almost as interesting to Pendlebury as that messenger of the gods himself might have been to dine with.

After dinner Copper Top imitated the cheesemonger to the life. "Horrible sounds," he concluded, "and you let a man like that shut up song-birds!"

He was considerably puzzled also over the proceedings in Court.

"You see," he said, "I suppose they want you to speak the truth, or why do they make you swear to? Then why do they let some rude person do his best to make you tell lies?"

"The Law is a very curious thing," answered Pendlebury. "These pears are excellent, Copper Top. There is really no reason why one should ever leave off——" He helped himself to his third. "The Law—yes—but it provides employment."

"That is what everything you do seems to be for," complained Copper Top. "You all batten on each other. It is most funny. It is a circle. You all run round. But a circle never gets anywhere. It has no interest."

"And where should we get if we went in a straight line?" asked Pendlebury.

"Nowhere," said Copper Top, and laughed. "Why

can't you work from the centre? You can't get anywhere except from the centre."

He poured the Doctor out another glass of port and began to peel walnuts for him. Pendlebury watched him. He liked to watch Copper Top. He liked to see him peeling walnuts with his long fine fingers. He liked to see him move with the unconscious ease and grace of a young animal.

"Copper Top," he said, "are you going to be good and sing in the choir? Yes, a bit of bread with the walnuts—a great improvement. I met Gimper this morning, and he seemed to be under the delusion that I had some influence."

"I am not," said Copper Top, so like the Professor that Pendlebury laughed. "I sing for him sometimes. Anthems. If they let me choose one I can bear. I will not sing hymns! Why Pen——" He stood before the fire and glared, and Pendlebury giggled again. It was just like the Professor! "How *can* you get together in a Dust Box and chant:

"Days and moments quickly flying  
Blend the living with the dead,  
Soon shall you and I be lying  
Each within his narrow bed."

He began to laugh. "Oh, Pen, it is such blinking nonsense!"

The flames rose gloriously from the crimson logs. They and the boy laughed together. No, he was not in the least like the Professor; he was like a flame of white fire.

"Copper Top, you mustn't call the Chapels Dust Boxes!"

"Well, but it is what they are. You ought not to shut



up dust. It's not fair on the dust. And then you go and sit in it and say it's beautiful. Why should you pray and praise always in a box? And why try to make its inside look like the glade of a wood and the arch of the sky, when the real thing, the live things, are there?"

"Well, that's only modern, or comparatively so, Tarzan," answered Pendlebury. "The ancient Greeks and Latins built their temples with roofs open to the sky. It was the Jew who first roofed his temple in with timber and metals. Our religion and our methods of worship are still mainly Jewish. St. John saw his visionary Heaven paved with gold and blazing with precious stones, and, by the way, I don't think mentions such a thing as a flower in it."

"That was stupid," said Copper Top.

He moved to the window, where two shadowy wings hovered in the dimness outside.

"Don't tell me——" began Pendlebury. "It's not the thrush?"

"Why not?" asked Copper Top. A speckled breast and two bright eyes became visible on the window-sill. He fed the bird with crumbs of cake. I can't get him to come into the room, but he comes most mornings and evenings for food."

"How do you know it's the same?"

Copper Top looked puzzled at the question. "Why, of course I know," he said.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said the Doctor, and helped himself to more port. "Look here, young man, that thrush is stolen goods. Neither more or less. It belongs to the cheesemonger. You are making me an accessory after the fact."

Copper Top grinned. "The fat little beast," he said. "Did you see the grease spots on his waistcoat? I hate

grease spots. Some of the Dons ought to be spoken to."

He sat on the window ledge with the thrush on his shoulder. Behind his beautiful head the dim November stars glimmered and went out and glimmered again.

"You were never the cheesemonger's, were you, little one?" he said to the bird. "A prisoner and a captive, that's what you were."

He turned to the Doctor. "Ishtar took me to see that cursed iniquity of yours, the Zoo. She thought I would enjoy it. She did not understand. Poor Star. And you can have a place like that, and yet the other day they were all praying in the Dust Box to their God: 'That it may please Thee to have mercy on all prisoners and captives.' Oh, Pen, you've no sense of humour. I wonder if your God has? If he has, He might let loose all the animals in the Zoo one evening."

Pen declined to let his imagination take such a flight. He resisted Copper Top's giggle.

"Copper Top, you must not talk about the Almighty having a sense of humour, and you must *not* call the chapels Dust Boxes. Why, it even makes *me* squirm, when I think of Kings."

"Does it?" asked Copper Top calmly. "I am glad."

"And why will you always say 'you'?" Why not 'we'?"

He liked to question the boy, and had none of the Professor's respect for him in this way. He was ready to dig about with any clumsy weapon, so long as he did not alienate him, on the chance he might extract something of interest, that some gateway of knowledge might stand for a moment ajar.

"I do not belong to your race," said Copper Top with dignity, and shuddered. He had drawn back almost

entirely into the shadow. The light from the high-swung lamp gleamed only on the curve of his throat and the flame of his hair.

"Old man," said Pendlebury, very softly, "where *do* you come from?"

Would the boy answer? He waited. Then the answer came quite simply.

"I don't know. I wish I did," said Copper Top, out of the shadows. "Often—since I have grown up—I wonder—I wonder if I slipped in with all of you by accident—or if there is some purpose. When I saw Ishtar after we came back—the first time—she came through the rain—water, you know."

Pendlebury did not know, but he held a breathless peace.

"I almost knew then. I felt standing on the edge of it. But it slipped away. Perhaps if she had felt the same just then. You can find out things together that you can't find out as one."

There was a pause. Pendlebury was nonplussed.

"But you are quite happy?" he asked.

"Why, yes. I'm happy. It would be so blinking stupid to be anything else, wouldn't it?" With which amazing statement he came back to the table. "I like this world ever so much. It's beautiful. All except you people. I think you are all a bit mad, you know. Have you read 'Gulliver's Travels'? But of course you've read everything! I feel like him sometimes. I wonder what the chap who wrote it really meant?"

"H'm, I've sometimes wondered too," murmured Pendlebury.

"Some of you are beautiful and have lovely things in you," Copper Top added. "Ishtar——" He stopped and smiled, and Pendlebury could have sworn that the



room lit up. It was not the fire, or the light from the swinging-lamp. He was annoyed with himself. Just the sort of silly thing women write in rotten books. Silly sickly books. But he could have sworn—— Then a thought flashed into his mind. A sudden vision. Unlike the Professor he saw the full impossibility of it. He almost heard Lady Condor say, "Poor dear Connie." He became helpless in the grip of an attack of the very worst giggles. Copper Top joined in. It was impossible for you to do otherwise, if you possessed even one sympathetic chord anywhere about you. Intelligent conversation rapidly became impossible. At ten minutes to ten Copper Top put the Doctor into his hat and coat, and set his giggling feet on the homeward path, explaining that it was impossible for him to be out at a later hour in his present condition without bringing discredit upon his grey hairs.

On his way home he met Don MacClean swinging down Trinity Lane.

"Hullo!" he thought. "Now surely you are in this *galère* too!"

Don seized on him. "Oh, Doctor, look here. Can you make Copper Top come up to Fenners? Regularly, I mean. There isn't a man up whom he couldn't beat on the track, or the high jump, long jump too, for the matter of that. I *know* there isn't, but—oh, you know what he is! There's no one to touch him. I've told all the fellows, and of course they don't believe because they haven't seen him."

"He'll never train," said Pendlebury.

"It doesn't matter. He can leave anyone standing without that."

"Is that so?" Pendlebury grew quite serious. "Of course he ought to then. Of course he must. But I

haven't an ounce of influence, my dear boy. Write to Godolphin. He might do it to please him. What's his objection?"

"Goodness knows! He says, 'Of course I run and jump, it's pleasant, but why should I try to beat someone else?' "

Pendlebury laughed.

"Oh, he's a freak," he said. "But rather a gorgeous freak. I'd give something to know his antecedents, and I'd give more to have been the one to find him on that pathway."

Don's eyes twinkled. "You'd have sent him to the Union, Doctor," he said. "Well, good night, sir, I'll have to hurry or be asking you for a note!"

He looked in at Richard's rooms on his way to his own. An argument was in progress. Richard favoured arguments as likely to be useful to him. They taught you to keep your temper, and a sharp eye on the holes in your opponent's case.

In the ordinary way, and according to precedent the Parliamentary career would have fallen to John. Unfortunately, and in spite of the fact that he had gone into a cavalry regiment, John had suddenly shown a disturbing tendency towards Socialism—"Not Bolshevism," as Lady Condor explained to her intimates. "Only quite a mild Socialism. It is really as common as measles among young men. The real danger is, that they may marry some impossible young woman with a wild head, who pretends to think them a hero. That sort of thing, you know."

So, as far as a parliamentary career went Richard had stepped into the shoes usually reserved for the eldest son. Richard's principles were sound to the core.

MacClean propped himself up against the door-post.

There was no possible room anywhere else for his big frame. Also he could keep a chink of the door open to breathe through. After the fresh, soft night air the atmosphere of the room was suffocating.

They argued upon many things at Cambridge. How to treat Bolshevism. Spiritualism and Psychic Phenomena. The Bible in the light of Modern Research. To-night they were arguing excitedly and in loud voices on "What is Greatness?"

A little fellow, still in his teens, was dusting the floor with Napoleon, and stoutly denying to any, but one who left the world happier than he found it, the title of Great. Another stoutly maintained, on the soundest principles, the Devil's claim.

MacClean laughed and plunged into the whirlpool.

"Name the Great Men who have left the world happier than they found it!" he shouted.

"Name! Name!" shouted the room in chorus.

The champion of the Good Great stammered, staggered, and was lost. What names ran through his paralysed brain no one knew. It could be seen that he reviewed many, hurriedly and feverishly, and as hurriedly and feverishly discarded them. Amid shouts and cat-calls and laughter the meeting "broke up in confusion."

After Pendlebury had left him, Copper Top turned out his lamps and slipped downstairs into the dim, soft November night. He passed among the shadows almost like one of them, and went out swiftly towards the open country. Here he struck into the wet fields, sweet beneath his feet, and ran across them, jumping hedge or ditch as he came to it. The dogs went with him, and neither hunted nor barked. He moved among shadowy trees, and spoke with the innumerable little tiny creatures that only stir by night. He called as a bird calls, and little migrant horned



owls came round and flew with him as he ran. The moon was high, but little clouds fled over her face one after the other. They came softly and greyly across the sky, and floated into full beauty as they crossed her path. Beneath her shadowed radiance the silent world lay in dim silver peace. And at last he came to the river, where it idled no longer, but moved steadily through undisturbed fields and woods, singing quietly to itself. The thin November mist drifted softly over all. He slipped his clothes off and stood an instant poised like some white bird, then the mists and the river took him to themselves. He loved the cold of the soft water, the strength of the moving flood that bore him on and on. He lay in its bosom, his face upturned to the drifting clouds. Presently they thinned, and soon the moon shone down undimmed, serene and full. Under her beams his white body gleamed like some pale flower. He sang with the river. Far off the clocks of Cambridge chimed the hour, and he laughed in his song. It was late. Only some few there still waked, wresting facts fiercely from hideous books, qualifying themselves for what weird pursuits, seeking what strange prizes? The others all slept, securely shut up. He laughed with the river and the moon. He swung with the world in its circle; with the great seas, as they gathered shouting and crashed on far beaches; with the winds and the clouds and the million stars, as they sang together. All these men asleep, shut up in their little dark dust-boxes. . . .

“Days and moments quickly flying  
Blend the living with the dead,  
Soon shall you and I be lying  
Each within his narrow bed.”

And yet they believed—— What did they believe?  
He floated with the stream. Above the moonlight

thrilled. He caught the gleam of shadowy Presences, once of starry eyes. The weavers of the winds. He cleft the water like some great shining salmon going outward to the sea, and saw in the vague fields and woods the outlines of dim shapes that sang a murmurous song. The weavers of the soil.

## CHAPTER V

CAMBRIDGE in May. The words had been singing to a pleasant tune in the Professor's heart ever since February. It is without doubt a fact, that those three words will rouse the music of gay and glad memories in the hearts of men of different minds and different hopes and every age, all over the globe, memories of grey old buildings set in green lawns among flowering trees, memories full of laughter and ragging, and desperate earnestness, and infinite possibilities. Cambridge in May. Yes, truly it has a pleasant sound. The Professor had continually repressed a continually returning desire, all through February and March and April, to run down to Cambridge, just for the night even, to see how the boy was getting on. Pendlebury was a fool and never wrote him about just what he wanted to know. Don wrote, "Don't believe what old Pen tells you. Copper's getting on A1." Copper Top never wrote at all. However, he extracted, by methods only known to himself, a couple of week-ends, and turned up at the Little House, which blazed and rang and purred with the warmth of his reception. Then he sat cross-legged as of old in front of the log fire and gave the Professor what was probably a unique account of 'Varsity life.

That he had endured it for so long, with even some measure of success, never ceased to astonish the Professor. It was more than he had dared hope for. He daily



returned thanks. The boy was taking his place in the world after recognised methods, or at least appeared to be. He, more or less, seemed to get on well with everybody. He did not antagonise people in spite of his extraordinary views. This was, the Professor knew, largely due to the unusual amount of that admirable quality of tolerance which Copper Top undoubtedly possessed. Copper Top wondered. He puzzled. Sometimes he literally gasped. But always he seemed to recognise the other fellow's right to his own idea of that which was wise and that which was foolish. The nearest thing that he knew to unhappiness came to him through the cruelty of man to weaker things.

On the whole the Professor was more than satisfied. He worked still at his book, but sometimes he wondered if it were worth while striving to teach men. A man must know a thing to be true for himself or you may talk till you are dead. And if he knows it for himself what need of talk? Yet it eased his mind to put down in close-spun prose, ornamented by the gold gleam of wit, his feelings about the wretched Fetishes which Humanity worshipped. It was indeed, curiously enough, quite good fun. So he wrote on, but he emerged more often than of old, and talked with Kathleen of the boy, and wandered in the woods and listened to Spring's weaving, and watched the pattern grow, and was conscious of it all with every beat of his heart, conscious that the whole scheme of things was perfect. Man might go against it, he was but a straw in the current, he might play for ever with his little toys of gold, his little baubles of revenge and lust and hatred, of dominion and power, but he could not alter by one jot that great perfect scheme. With or without him it would accomplish itself. And he never for an instant suspected that he cared for poor Humanity strug-

gling after bits and scraps of no value, worshipping its foolish little Fetishes in the pit it had digged for itself. Still less did he suspect that he was so angry and bitter and disgusted because he cared so much.

In the meantime May came at last. A beautiful May with all its flowering shrubs and trees a riot in the sunshine, and the Professor trod the well-remembered ways, his hands behind his back and his beard at the acute angle which denoted supreme satisfaction. It was pleasant to be back in the old place. Very pleasant. He was dressed with unusual care. He wore a tie. Copper Top's favourite colour for him, deep orange. Indeed, so far as his clothes were concerned he would have excited no comment except for his hat, which was one of those curiosities the Professor had a special gift for picking up.

But he was too well known to pass unrecognised at Cambridge. Many of the undergraduates looked at him, some saluted as they passed. Several of the queer-shaped black figures that are part of Cambridge stopped to greet him. It was all pleasant. How many years ago since he was part of the life here, and yet he did not feel a ghost. He was still part of it. He turned in at the great Trinity Gate under the statue of Henry VIII., niched in the attitude peculiar to that monarch. No, he was no more a ghost than were Bacon or Newton or Byron or Thackeray, or any of the men who had lived and worked and played and dreamed here. They were all part of the life of Cambridge too. It wouldn't have seemed strange to him if any one of them had met him crossing the great court. He smiled to himself, thinking how any little undergrad would have the right to greet them as old friends. The sun was everywhere, blazing from mid-day skies. He stood blinking in it, and watched the silver wheel of pigeon wings around the Fountain.



Shouts of laughter came floating down from a high-up window. The wisteria in the far right-hand corner was in perfect bloom. And under it the border—yes—just as of old—yellow wallflowers! He walked all round to sniff the well-remembered scents mingled together. Had he noticed either at the time? He didn't think so. And yet some part of him had recorded both. He remembered. Yes, who was it had had those rooms, full of scent of wisteria and wallflowers, in his day. A fellow with ears that stuck out—a fellow—of course, it was Latimer—a fine scholar too—he made a rotten marriage—of course—killed at Ladysmith. He moved on, and passed into the far court. The long familiar lines of Wren's great library stretched before him. The inside leapt into his conscious memory. He must visit it before he left. He looked at his watch. It would soon be time to meet Copper Top. Copper Top was attending a lecture on John Knox, Reformer, who interested Copper Top not at all, but he was "keeping" necessary things during the Professor's visit with a view to pleasing him. The Professor was lunching in Hall with him. They were to meet at twelve-fifteen sharp on Trinity Bridge. The Professor went under the archway of the cloisters out into the gracious spaces of close-mown turf between whose banks the river idled its pleasant way. He propped himself against the bridge and revelled in the cheerful sun-bathed peace. The tennis courts were alive with players. There were many canoes and punts on the river. Boys in flannels and college colours and girls in bright-hued coats, bare, shining, silken heads, lithe limbs, laughter, and gay voices. The Professor watched and smiled benevolently. It was a good place for a boy, a good place.

He wondered who christened the craft, noting the names as they passed beneath them. *Mamselle Tra-la-la*,



*The Spasm, The Love Nest, The Red Devil.* Were they efforts of the boat-builder, or the man who hired them out? Or did they belong to private owners, who had risen to these poetic heights?

The clocks chimed from many towers. It was twelve. Copper Top should soon be here. He watched the arch beneath the library, and soon, moving swiftly across the sun and shadow, he saw the beloved figure. Copper Top, in his loose white flannels and silken shirt, his gleaming bronze head, his smile that lighted up the world for James Godolphin.

"Oh, 'Dophin, what a morning!" he cried. "Look at the blessed everything. And I have spent it listening to poor old Kesteven mumbling long sentences about John Knox, who was a good man gone mad on sin. 'Dophin, it's lovely seeing you here. We have just time to take the taste of John Knox out of my mouth before lunch. Come, I *must* show you."

He took the Professor's arm. The Professor knew the compliment was as great as when the child's hand used to slip into his. He was happy. The boy chattered and the sun shone and the world was a pleasant place. Copper Top led him down the avenue, across the stream. There were wonderful shadows in the water. The brilliant green of the weed shone out of them. The blue and silver of stitchwort and speedwell starred the hedges.

"Look," said Copper Top. It was just a beechwood carpet with blue-bells and rabbits parsley *à l'heure exquisite*. The Professor rose to the full of the occasion unconsciously. He gasped.

"My dear," he said after a pause. "It's—it's not quite possible!"

"It makes you shiver, doesn't it?" whispered Copper Top. "Joy shivers! From the top of your head to the

tips of your heels. We will walk through it, 'Dophin, but you mustn't talk."

They walked through it and the boy held his hand. He felt as if they dipped down into some strange depth of beauty and bathed in it. And there had always been blue-bell woods. And so many springs. How many for him? And he had never known before——

"That was most good," said Copper Top. He looked back into the mysterious glory through which they had passed. His face glowed. "You did feel it?" he asked.

"A little," said the Professor. "But that little was a great deal," he added with sudden earnestness.

"Now there is something else," said Copper Top. "Then you will know, and you can come when you want. You will not miss the forest so much."

The Professor followed humbly. So far he had not missed the forest at all. Copper Top led him under great elms, across the road and through iron gateways.

"Shut your eyes, shut them tight," he ordered.

It was his old child's way when he had a surprise ready.

The Professor laughed and obeyed. Copper Top led him round a curve.

"Now!" he said.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Professor, and blinked in the fierce sunlight.

A field of silver-white jonquils, of yellow and crimson and pale rose tulips—— No! Silver-white jonquils and tulips growing in a field—a proper field of tall grasses and moon-daisies and buttercups. All growing together in friendly beauty, and the one not seeming more at home than the other. Blossom trees, too, lived here and there among them, crab-apple and double cherry. And all

around, as guarding some sacred place, stood tall trees lighting their spring glory of leaf happily in the deep warm peace.

Copper Top still held his hand lightly. For one magic moment of marvel the Professor stood and gazed. Colour—perfume—light—warmth—all pulsing together—wonderful—— One needed another sense—— In another moment—if he could only hold on—look deeper—feel deeper—he would surprise the secret. He could hear them all breathing—whispering—many coloured music. . . .

The moment was gone before he could grasp it. He stood there blinking in the sunshine. Little ripples of scented breeze, of quivering light, wandered over that marvellous field.

“Upon my word, it makes one feel drunk,” he said. “The scent and colour—the whole astonishing thing. Does it—do they—I got an impression—do they sing, Copper Top?”

“Sing,” echoed Copper Top. “Why, ’Dophin, look at the colours.”

The Professor moved to a seat and sat down heavily. It was dislocating to get into Copper Top’s world in patches like this. It must be—of course it must be—equally dislocating for the boy to get into his. This place with Copper Top. And a couple of hours ago he had been reading the *Times* and discussing with Pen the sterilising of criminals. Good Lord! People were still discussing those sort of things—necessary discussions—just across the road as it were.

He looked at Copper Top. The boy was standing a few feet away. Standing on the edge of that wonderful field. Standing on the edge of . . . ? The Professor’s mind moved hurriedly among various ideas. There had



always been something about Copper Top which had made him think of a greyhound on a leash, of a martin with spread wings, yet who could not fly. . . . It was more noticeable, not less. Cambridge had made no difference. It had not absorbed him. Did he really wish it had? He did not know what he wished.

Copper Top turned and looked at him from under dreaming brows. Then a smile crept over his face, a little quizzical smile.

"Oh 'Dophin," he said, "you are not enjoying it!"

"Yes, yes," lied the Professor. "I am. It's amazing. We never saw anything better, not even on the Campagna, did we?"

"It wouldn't matter if we did." Copper Top held out a hand and the butterflies came. The Professor watched him and forgot to puzzle. The first magic moment had passed. It was already a dream, an irrecoverable dream. But he enjoyed. He was sorry when the many chiming clocks from many towers called again.

"Time is a confounded nuisance," said Copper Top. "Why did you invent it? I've made your day for you, 'Dophin. Do you mind? As soon as Hall is over Don and I are taking you in a punt up the river."

"Good," said the Professor. "The last time . . ." He broke into reminiscences which lasted until they came again to the Backs.

He paused in sight of King's Chapel and looked at it happily.

"It's just like a stag-beetle," said Copper Top following his gaze.

"A stag-beetle!" echoed the Professor. "My dear boy, what on earth do you mean?"

But—the deuce and all—it *was* like a stag-beetle, lifting its horned head and looking alertly across the Backs.

"I wonder why the old chaps who built it thought of that," Copper Top went on without noticing the Professor's query. "Inside they've got a look of trees in the evening-time. The glass with the sun shining through—that makes colours a little bit like real ones."

"You think it's beautiful, though," the Professor half asserted, half questioned.

Copper Top retained all his old dislike to answering questions. "It is an imitation," was all he said. "But they thought of beautiful things. That is always good. Pen has a picture of a sunset. People come to look at it. It is quite a good imitation. But there are real sunsets every day."

They fell into the crowd of undergraduates hurrying and striding along, singly or in groups, laughing, talking, tumbling over one another. Soon they were amid the clatter of plates and utensils. The smell of baked meats. The noise of shuffling feet and moving chairs as each man settled into his place.

The familiar scene broke pleasantly on the Professor. The lofty-roofed old Hall, brown and gold, touched here and there with vivid colour. The portraits of dead and gone celebrities of Trinity, looking down on the young burnished heads, the colour and movement of the life below. (His seat faced the well-remembered picture of Frederick Maurice. What a pair of eyes the fellow had. Who was the artist? A good man——)

He looked round. The chat, the laughter, the clatter of knives and forks, the row of cheerful faces, yes—all pleasantly familiar. Copper Top—— The fellows seemed to like him. Friendly jokes had been levelled at him as they came in, which fell away into hurried silence when they realised that he had a visitor with him. Evidently not to eat meat excited no comment here. Vegetarian

dishes were served as a matter of course. Uncommonly good too! The professor enjoyed his meal. Copper Top had ordered a bottle of his favourite white wine, and strawberries and cream to finish up with.

The sensation of being looked after by the boy was agreeable, very agreeable. He took his place quite well and naturally in this little world of college life. There wasn't a man to touch him for looks—for presence—— And here the Professor broke off and laughed at himself. Didn't every father and mother think just the same about their boys!

But he was very happy! He enjoyed his afternoon too. The three boys laughed, and chattered, and sang, and played the fool, and treated him with the most gratifying affection and respect.

Above the water meadows the larks flooded the radiance with ecstatic hallelujahs. Great stretches of pale cuckoo flowers and shining marsh marigolds flashed into beauty and passed away. Little silver birch woods whispered, and green lady willows drooped to the river, as it idled its pleasant way between its flowered banks. Had he ever noticed in the old days how exquisite it was?

The serene grey pinnacles of Kings disappeared from the horizon, and little Grantchester—alas! dear Rupert Brooke—with its apple orchards still in bloom, drifted by. Now they were in the shallows and the punt grounded suddenly and heavily. Richard, laughing and swearing, shoved her off, and she struck again in about two minutes. Don made uncomplimentary remarks concerning Richard's methods. He seized the pole. "If you keep your eye upon what you are doing you will notice——" he began, and grounded well and truly for the third time.

Then pandemonium reigned while the two fell into the bottom of the punt and struggled for possession of the



pole, and Copper Top sang the Saga of the fight above them.

Spent with much laughter, and splashed with much water, the Professor was at last convoyed into the safety of Byron's Pool, and there he had a chat with Don Mac-Clean while Richard and Copper Top skirmished about in the water.

"Oh, old Copper gets on quite well," Don assured him. "Nobody takes him seriously, of course. You can't, you know. And he doesn't work. But I suppose you don't mind that?"

"No," said the Professor. "I don't quite know what he could work at that would be of any use to him."

"What shall you put him into, sir?" asked Don.

"Well," said the Professor, and stopped. "You see," he went on after a moment, "he'll have enough to live on."

Don looked respectfully doubtful.

"A fellow ought to work at something," he suggested.

"Yes," agreed the Professor, and looked guilty. "But what would you suggest?"

"It is a bit difficult," owned Don. "I could give him some agent's work up at my place, only—well, you couldn't very well put him on a sporting estate. He'd pal on with the grouse and the curlew, and as for the deer——"

"Exactly," said the Professor. "And farming presents the same difficulty."

"I suppose he could do something with his music," suggested Don, but doubtfully. "I don't mean as a public singer. I'd hate that for him. But composing songs—and that sort of thing, you know. It's not much of a profession, of course, but Doctor Pendlebury thinks he'd be rather good at it."

Don's square handsome face was full of an earnest and most serious desire to help. He loved Copper Top.

The Professor strangled a smile and nodded gratefully.

"It would be something to fall back on anyway," added Don.

"You talk to him about these things? About following some profession?" asked the Professor.

"Well you can't somehow—at least not sensibly," explained Don. "He never seems a bit interested in himself you know. That's what's so queer. You can't get him to consider how a thing will affect him. He's only interested in the thing."

"How does he get on with the other fellows?" asked the Professor.

"Oh, very well on the whole. They like him, I think. He's made one or two bad enemies though."

"Ah!" said the Professor.

"There's one who might be dangerous. I keep an eye on him. He's the sort of chap you never know. He hoards a thing up, and pays you out when he can. He's got influence too, with a certain set. He tried to take old Copper up. Liked his music, and all that you know."

"What happened?" asked the Professor.

"Well, of course you can't take Copper up. And Bloxsome's a bit of a conceited ass. Then there was something about a book he lent Copper. A pretty rotten book," Don explained hurriedly. "Copper stuffed it into the fire, and of course there was a bit of a shindy——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor again, and leant forward.

"Well, I wasn't there, you know, but the story is that Bloxsome lost his temper and went for Copper, and jolly well got the worst of it."

The Professor leant back again and radiated satisfaction.

"A good thing I taught him to put up his fists," he said, and chuckled. "What was the end of the affair?"

"Oh, Copper's forgotten all about it, I fancy. But Bloxsome hasn't, and he never will. If he ever gets a chance he'll pay Copper out. He's built that way. But you needn't worry. Copper can look after himself all right. Besides, Richard and I keep an eye on him."

He stood up and stretched.

"I think, if you don't mind, sir, I'll have a swim."

The Professor watched him strip and dive. What a beautiful thing the human body was, in perfection. Presently he heard cheerful shouts of welcome, and then Copper Top, like some gleaming fish, came cleaving the water towards him.

"Why aren't you coming, 'Dophin?" he called.

Why? The Professor hesitated. He was a Professor. An old man. At College Professors did not do these things in their old age. But why not? All contorted—doubled up—rheumatism—sciatica—caught cold easily. The Professor shook his beard and blinked. Was Cambridge already absorbing him? He would not be absorbed. He yelled back a defiant "Coming," stripped, and plunged in.

That evening the Fellows of Magdalen gave a great dinner in his honour. They all, more or less, made speeches, and the Professor responded to the toast of the evening, not suitably, but typically. His audience rocked with joy, and Pendlebury offered his portrait to the College if the authorities would have the courage to hang it.

"A misguided man. But how full of humour, and what a brain!" said one of the Deans to another as they went home together, pleasantly entertained and replete.



The Professor and Pendlebury sat on in the exquisitely panelled sitting-room of the Fellows overlooking the garden, and agreed that Copper Top must have a profession.

Unfortunately they had also to agree that when Copper Top presented an obstacle to any proposition it was always an unsurmountable one.

"It's like he is over sports or games, you know," said the Doctor. "He'll do anything for the joy of doing it, but to win, or to gain something, well he doesn't seem able to see why he should want to do any of these things, or what use they are. You can't make him see. It's some sense he lacks, and there you are. As to fame or money, you might as well talk about bits of straw or stick. And, Jimmy, the boy's got a mine of both in his music.

"Ah, Don said something about that. And you really think——"

"My dear fellow! Surely you know the boy is an original genius. He ought to be able to compose music that would shake Europe!"

"Yes. Yes. I know!" The Professor clutched his beard. "To create. He would understand that. He would think that worth while."

Pendlebury laughed. "Perhaps. I don't know. You *can't* hold out the usual inducements to Copper Top. To hear your own compositions played on one of our best orchestras—well just think of it. I've had a few songs published—but that Opera of mine—I'd die happy—if I could hear it produced at Covent Garden—or anywhere—just *once!* I'd die happy."

The Professor nodded. "I remember when I got the proof sheets of my first book," he murmured.

"Well, suggest that inducement to the boy and he'll only smile at you. Positively he is not in the least interested

in a thing because it is his, or because he'll get anything out of it. He's only interested in the thing itself."

"Yes, I know," said the Professor.

"Then he does not approve of our instruments. He more or less dislikes a piano, I believe. I—well sometimes I'm tempted to believe he hears an orchestra compared to which ours are like Toy Symphonies performed by the ladies of the parish at a Charity Concert!"

"Oh, so you think too——" The Professor stopped. The two men looked at each other.

Then Pendlebury burst out: "Look here, we've got hold of something pretty wonderful, I fancy, and we can't get anything out of it. Nothing tangible. It intrigues me beyond words, but if the boy can tell you, he won't, so there it is. What is genius, anyway? Who knows? Music is our only chance. Jimmy, I'm dead keen on his taking up music seriously."

"Errmph!" grunted the Professor. "Just to satisfy your little curiosity."

"No it isn't," protested Pendlebury. "It's not my little curiosity. It's the larger sort. Besides, the boy ought to have some work to do."

The Professor grunted again. "What is the ordinary training for a composer?" he asked.

"Three years at counterpoint and harmony. Then as many more at orchestration. I got him to do some exercises with me. Of course, with an ear like his, teaching him harmony is teaching him something he knows already. And Harmony is a Natural Law. I find he has a profound respect for Natural Laws."

"It is only the fool who hasn't. Well, Pen, I'll have a talk with him."

A shadow darkened the light behind them.

"Come out," said Copper Top's voice. "It is a night

of May nights, and there is a nightingale singing in your garden."

"Copper Top! How did you get in?"

"Up the big elm tree and along the top of the wall."

"Did anyone see you?"

"They didn't make a row if they did. Besides, I'm calling on you." Copper Top grinned mischievously.

"Aren't you coming out?"

"No, but we'll come and sit in the window."

"Can you see the moon from there? Yes. All right then."

He sat himself on the window-sill with the moon peeping in over his shoulder. Pendlebury could have sworn she winked.

"I came along to tell you I've been singing in the Chapel with Gimpy. He wanted to practise. I knew you'd be pleased. I sang *Adeste Fideles*. Only we had no voices for the chorus."

"You don't mind singing that?" asked Pendlebury.

"No. It does praise—in a small way, you know—like you do everything. I could have sung it better outside. But the moon was shining in wherever she got a chance, so it wasn't so bad."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked the Professor. "I should have liked to hear you."

"But you were being entertained at dinner," answered Copper Top. "And all of you talking at once. And did you make a good speech, and behave yourself properly, and not tell anyone the truth about things?"

"I spoke with my usual wit and wisdom," replied the Professor. "And Pen made the most famous after-dinner speech in all his famous after-dinner career. You lost a great deal by not accepting your invitation. Copper Top, we have been talking about you."



Copper Top looked from one to the other. "I believe you two often do," he said.

"I want you to take up music seriously, old chap," the Professor continued. "As a profession, you know. I want you to learn to write music, so that you can give what you hear to others—to the world."

"What I hear," repeated Copper Top. "But that would be just imitating, it would not be my own. It would be like that." He nodded towards a perfect little sunset picture by Corot on the wall opposite him. "There are a thousand sunsets every night better than that. Real. And as to music, I take what stuff I want and weave my own patterns."

"Well, give us your weaving then. Write it down for us. And why should you not imitate what is beautiful?"

Copper Top was looking again at the sky, where the stars were coming out one by one to keep the moon company. He did not answer for a moment, and both men waited. Against the night sky his profile took on an almost unearthly transparency and beauty. It looked as if made out of moon "stuff."

Then, "We never did," he murmured. "We created \_\_\_\_\_"

He stopped, and the silence fell and fell with the moonbeams. Neither the Professor nor Pendlebury dared to break it. Would he tell them more?

But after a while he only turned a puzzled look on them. He looked tired, and Copper Top was never tired.

"I will think about it," he said.

"But——" began Pendlebury, and yelled. The Professor had kicked him with violence. Most unnecessary violence. The lightest touch would have been quite sufficient.

"That's good, old man," said the Professor. "I wish I had heard you sing in Chapel to-night."

"I sing much better where you do hear me," answered Copper Top. "I can't make out why you like your music in such horrid places. Even if you must be shut up, you might make them beautiful. Pen made me go with him to a concert at the Guild Hall. Oh, 'Dophin, have you seen its inside? I'm going to sing the anthem for Gimpy next Sunday, though. Why don't you stay?"

"Of course I'll stay," said the Professor. "What is the anthem?"

"It's by Mendelssohn. It's quite good," replied Copper Top calmly, and Pendlebury ceased to nurse his shin and his injured feelings, and giggled. "It's 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever truly find me, saith your God.' And those are true words. Not like some of them. At least I do not know about your God. He is such a curious one."

"Copper Top, there is only one God."

"That is also true," said Copper Top gravely. "But I expect you make imitations of Him, just like you do of everything, and your imitation God is a very curious one. You both think so really, don't you? So why do you pretend to me?"

He stood up, and stretched his full length, with his hands behind his head. He was uncannily like—what *was* he like? And he smiled down at them both, gleefully, with a child's delight in their discomfiture.

"I am going. I will think about the music," he said, and vanished over the window-sill.

"Copper Top!" Pendlebury leant out of the window and called after him in a portentous whisper. "You must have a note from me. Copper Top!"

But Copper Top was gone. Only two notes, that might have been a bird's, came floating back to him, mocking, tantalising, indescribably sweet: "Good night."

## CHAPTER VI

THE Professor stayed on. So did the wonderful weather. The sun blazed down out of cloudless skies. The flowers continued to riot in extravagant profusion. He wandered about happily; watched cricket matches, played croquet with Pendlebury, looked in at all the book shops, and spent hours at the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Sunday duly arrived and he and Pendlebury strolled down to Trinity in good time for service. In the ante-chapel where Newton and Bacon sit with Macaulay and Tennyson in cold white state, the Verger received them with respectful effusion, and allowed them to choose their own seats.

The Professor had not been inside a church for many a long year. He remembered the smell at once; it was just the same. A curious smell. It seemed connected in the same queer way with the dim light. "Dim religious light." Why must religious light be dim? Was the smell—? Almost unconsciously he had found his way into his old seat. He knelt down, bent his head, and put his left hand over his eyes. Old long-forgotten words of prayer came to his mind and checked his wandering thoughts. He began to recapture something of the attitude of the boy who had striven in this Chapel after a sense of his own utter sinfulness and unworthiness in the sight of God. After a right understanding of God's infinite goodness and mercy. Again the difficulty of reconciling the two gripped him. The boy had been



so desperately in earnest—had tried so hard—he thought of him with pity as if he had been someone else. Well, so he was. What connection was there between that struggling, enthusiastic, red-headed young fellow and himself?

Again, instinctively, he checked his wandering thoughts. More old-remembered words of prayer came back to him and clicked through his mind. He sat up and looked round. Slowly everything came back to him except the feeling that here he would find help, comfort, light. Now—it was strange—the very atmosphere, hanging heavily, almost tangibly, seemed to choke him.

He recognised the old familiar figures in the windows, the wall paintings. Copper Top would like the paintings. They were all trees. Only they weren't very like trees! They were dead, stiff-looking caricatures. He looked up at the flat roof. The sunshine failed to penetrate anywhere. The whole place seemed filled with gold dust.

The voluntary began. Deep soft notes, that rose and fell and soared, rousing echoes far up above. The still dead air shook and thrilled, and as it did so, somehow the Professor felt a sense of relief. The vestry door opened and the choir filed slowly in, bringing with them one long shaft of light in which the dust assumed a strange life of its own. The Professor and Copper Top mutually caught sight of each other, and Copper Top screwed up his nose and made a little grimace. The choir and the officiating clergy moved into their seats, the last echoes of the voluntary died away, and the service began.

The Professor tried to follow it. When *did* the anthem come? By the end of the Psalm he was beginning to feel horribly nervous. David, in terse and excellent English, was calling down abomination of every

description on the head of the evil doer. He wondered what Copper Top was thinking. Pendlebury was singing lustily, and appeared to be enjoying himself.

The lesson followed. The wonderful story of Ruth. Copper Top would like it. Pendlebury was nodding. He would be asleep in another minute. He had eaten far too much for lunch.

At last the first notes of the anthem sounded. Every one stood up. The Professor saw Copper Top throw his head back. Instinctively he looked up too, and, to his astonishment, far above, flitting among the gold dust, his eyes caught the rhythmic flit of a bird's wings glancing to and fro. How on earth——?

The organist paused, waiting for a brief beat of time, and in that pause Copper Top began to sing.

The organ stopped suddenly on a note that was half begun.

"God bless my—" began the Professor, and choked. He looked at Pendlebury with agonised eyes, and Pendlebury looked at him with a half-shake of his head, and Copper Top sang, unaccompanied.

A curious rustle passed over the choir and spread to the congregation. At last it penetrated to the Dean. His head emerged from between his shoulders and he looked round tortoise-wise.

The golden voice rang on. The dim walls of the Chapel seemed to yield before it. Everything glad and fresh, sweet and wild, was making music over all the world. The rustling ceased. No one moved any more.

The Professor would have been in a state of frantic anxiety but that an extraordinary lightness of heart overtook him and carried him out of the reach of any such useless thing. An amazing joyousness bubbled up within him from some secret unknown fount. He wanted

to sing too. Everybody ought to sing! Even the Dean. He caught sight of his bald head, still extended tortoise-wise. He was evidently disturbed—perplexed. An insane desire to laugh seized the Professor. He looked at Pendlebury out of the corner of his eye. The Doctor was leaning back in his seat, beaming with a delight that bordered upon ecstasy.

The song soared up and up. Surely in another moment it would be beyond the reach of human ears. Indescribably joyous, almost unbearably sweet. The Professor drew a long breath. Joy! Happiness! Adoration! Beyond Sensation, beyond Thought. Then a great silence that hovered above his head like a benediction. God bless the boy!

There was a sigh, a rustle, as the congregation moved simultaneously. They moved uneasily. The thought recurred. "What had happened?" Clearly they had not been listening to "sacred" music. The spell lifted. This extraordinary exhilaration in church, was it not rather odd. Curious eyes were turned towards the Dean. His head was again between his shoulders. Now he was droning something on one note.

The Professor began to wonder. His anxiety returned. What was everybody thinking, more especially the Dean?

He was still wondering when he found himself outside in the sunshine, and stood, almost unconsciously, reveling in it. After all, if the boy had sung something that could not exactly be described as "sacred" music, did it really matter? And was not Joy a most fit offering at the altar? The scent of the wisteria and wallflower rose up like incense under the hot sun. The pigeon cooed above the fountain in dreamy peace.

"Did you see the Dean's face?" asked Pendlebury,



and giggled. "But what a song! What a voice! I wonder what Gimper thought of it? The Verger is dreadfully upset! Hullo, MacClean! What did you think of it?"

The little man was undoubtedly excited. The music had gone to his head like wine. He had an intense desire to sing and shout. Don looked troubled.

"I think, you know, it was a mistake," he said. "It wasn't the sort of thing to do in church."

Richard Moresby joined them. The expression on his face left no doubt that he was in full agreement with Don.

"What on earth possessed Copper to sing something secular?" he asked. "There'll be no end of a row."

"It was that beastly bird set him off," said Don. "I wonder how it got in."

"Bird?"

"Didn't you see it? It was flying about in the roof."

The Dean emerged in an apparently irritable conversation with the organist. Mr. Gimper was a tall thin man, with a pair of lambent eyes above an enormous nose and an almost entire lack of chin. He was endeavouring to sooth the Dean. But the Dean appeared unsoothable. He acknowledged the respectful salutations of the little group curtly. His head was darting from side to side as he walked, his tongue darted with it, taking each corner of his mouth in turn.

"I'll have a talk with him later, when he's cooled down," said Pendlebury. "But he'll have Copper Top up to-morrow for a certainty." His eyebrow twitched. "I'd give something to be there," he added.

"Where is Copper Top?" asked the Professor, anxiously.

"We're to meet him at Trinity Raft, sir," answered

Don. "We're going up the river, and you're all having supper with me afterwards."

"Yes, yes," said the Professor. "Of course! I had forgotten. Pen, if you don't behave you will be left behind."

"I don't care," said Pendlebury perversely. "I want a voice like Copper Top's. I want to be able to sing. We are all much too serious. God loveth a cheerful liver. Don't look so glum, Jimmy. I will talk to the Dean. He has a human side, though he is quite unaware of it himself. Nothing more will happen than that Copper Top will get a wiggling, which he won't give a row of pins for, to-morrow morning."

But something else did happen, for Mr. Bloxsome saw his chance to repay Copper Top with interest for the burning of his book, and his subsequent defeat with ignominy. Already the College was humming with various more or less garbled accounts of what had happened at the afternoon service. Bloxsome found no difficulty in convincing quite a number of people that Copper Top had been guilty of an intentional insult. Indeed the suggestion ran, as an ill suggestion generally does, like fire on a sun-scorched heath. He also found no difficulty in getting a large band of helpers together to teach young Godolphin a salutary lesson.

Between them they collected:

- 2 lbs. of Black Treacle.
- 2 lbs. Golden Syrup.
- 2 lbs. of Margarine.
- 3 Bottles of Green Ink.
- 1 Bottle of Cherry Blossom Boot Polish, Black.
- 1 Sackful of Cut Grass.

Bloxsome himself would be the "smarmer" in chief. He smiled contentedly as he surveyed the preparations. The programme included a ducking in the Fountain, a smarming with the various condiments collected, and running the gauntlet of an avenue of stalwarts each armed with a pail of water.

Bloxsome contemplated a vision of Copper Top's beautiful shining body after he had dealt with it, and purred with satisfaction. He was aware of the supper party. Everything played into his hands.

It broke up early, for both Don and Richard were going in for a "Trip" in History. There was only a bare fortnight before the exam, and both were "sapping" with the desperate vigour belonging to that period.

After supper, in the neat little lecture of about ten minutes, the Professor proved to them that to go in for a Tripos in History was not only waste of time that could valuably be spent otherwise, but was also positively injurious to the mind in various ways besides that of giving you confused, and in many cases totally incorrect ideas on the subject dealt with. This was a very serious matter, because History, when intelligently studied, was our only means of knowing what to avoid and what to strive after in the matter of governing nations.

A Tripos in Law was even more to be condemned. It taught and encouraged the methods employed since the War by the various Governments of Europe at various Conferences. Conferences which had darkened counsel, confused issues, and were rapidly making a fresh War more inevitable.

He would probably have continued to knock down fetishes like nine-pins for some considerable time, just for the pleasure of watching the mingling of mystification, disapproval, and amusement on MacClean's and



Moresby's faces, had Pendlebury's delight been less noticeable. The Doctor was still under the spell of Copper Top's song. He was in his very finest form, and made an after supper speech that he chuckled over for many days, and related its best points to all his friends.

The incident of the song in Chapel was not alluded to. Copper Top had been so entirely innocent of the fact that he had done anything that he ought not to have done, and had so eagerly demanded if they had liked it, that no one had the heart to tell him that half the College was shocked, and that the Dean was probably talking of irreverence if not of Profanity.

"You see," Copper Top explained, "it isn't often possible to sing that song when you are shut up in a lot of dust. So it seemed rather a pity not to."

The Trinity clock was just striking the quarter to eleven as the whole party went down the old stone stairway that led from MacClean's rooms into the centre court, stumbling and tumbling over one another in the dark. Only Copper Top, who possessed a cat-like vision, ran down easily in front of the others.

As he reached the passage there came a sudden rush of feet, a number of figures moved swiftly among the shadows, and masked faces closed round him. One moment the passage looked like a football scrimmage, the next it was empty.

Don, who was behind his guests, holding a guttering candle above his head in a polite attempt to light them down the stairs, suddenly hurled it from him, and dashed past them.

"They've got Copper," he shouted. "Come on, Dick!"

At the bottom of the stairs he ran into the red-headed youth who had dealt so roughly with Napoleon.

"What's the game, Murray?" he asked.

"They're mad because of that Chapel stunt this afternoon," said Murray hurriedly, as they ran along together. "They're going to smarm him and duck him in the Fountain. I only just heard. I was coming to warn you."

"Bloxsome of course?"

"He started it."

The three tore out into the court. The Professor and Pendlebury hurried after them.

"They won't hold Copper Top long, if I know anything about him," said the Professor, and chuckled.

But Don knew this was no friendly rag. Bloxsome meant mischief.

Outside a complete full moon hung in a cloudless sky above the great court. From every doorway hurrying figures passed out and ran hither and thither, laughing and calling. The whole place had become suddenly alive. A crowd surged towards the Fountain. On its steps the masked group were already busy, and Don's great shoulders cleft an urgent way towards them.

Then, suddenly, a great roar went up.

Copper Top had sprung into one of the arches of the Fountain, stark naked as on the day he was born.

Yet he was clothed. Clothed in that most excellent garment, Beauty. A Beauty of so radiant and majestic a quality that the shouting died away before it.

Below, Don and Richard fought the masked men. Soon their preparations of treacle, ink, and paint, were seized and used as weapons against them. The Professor, as soon as he arrived on the scene, joined in the scrimmage, and wielded a tin of golden syrup and a paint brush well and effectively. Pendlebury, who, now he knew that Copper Top was safe from indignity, was enjoying the whole affair enormously, meditated clamber-

ing to another archway and making a speech. While he dallied with the fascinating idea, Copper Top began to laugh.

It was the old delightful infectious laugh of the child. It ran across the upturned faces, rippling with the moonlight, and flooded the whole great court with mirth. In another moment the whole crowd was laughing with him, and Bloxsome, hard-pressed with his own weapons, cursed with a vigour and exhaustiveness that rejoiced the hearts of his opponents.

Then Copper Top's mood changed, even while they laughed.

"What was wrong with my song?" he said, and his golden voice carried like a clear bell. "Why did you not like it in your Church? It was the song of all Creation, to Him"—he bent his head with a very real and gracious reverence—"who made it. Don't you see that everything must join in, because only the voice of the Whole is great enough to praise Him."

A voice rose up out of the listening crowd. "Sing your song."

Copper Top hesitated. He looked down over the sea of faces. They were earnest. They shone with a clean light.

Other voices took up the cry. "Sing your song."

And Copper Top sang. Softly at first, while the moonlit court filled with scent of newly-turned earth, of bracken in wet sunlit woods, of purple heather on wide moors, of salt seas tossed in the wind, of flowers hot in the sun, of kine in dewy pastures, to each man as was his love.

Then the song rose, and with it some strange spiritual wind, a secret whisper in each man's heart, warm and sweet and very close. The song filled with colour. The



colour of all the sunrises in the world, holding high festival. It was the mating song of all desirous things creating in harmony. Everything was singing, from the stones beneath their feet to the moon and the stars swinging above, singing to the same great rhythm. Everything was singing! They were singing themselves! From some inner centre of being, as a bird, after long captivity in darkness might sing, freed to the sun and the air and the courage of its wings.

And then it was all over. The white figure had disappeared. There was a momentary queer hush. A few moved away very quietly. One looked at another. Typically they began to resent having given way to a great emotion, and the tension broke into a roar of applause, into shouts for Copper Top. Improvised instruments made awful sounds, groups began to scrimmage, and in another moment the whole great court was filled with a babel of voices and a moving sea of figures.

Pendlebury sat on the Fountain steps and rocked himself to and fro, still obvious to all but the song.

"Great Scott," he muttered to himself as he rocked. "But it's unbelievable—he's a sorcerer—a witch—what's the masculine?—a wizard—he could wake the soul of an oyster—he could hypnotise dragons. And he doesn't care a damn—not a damn! He can sing like an angel of God in an earthly skin—and he doesn't care! Where's Jimmy?"

Copper Top, who had slipped through the crowd like a flash, made for the entrance to Don's rooms in search of clothing, and found it blocked by the figure of the Dean, no less, in the company of a guest who had been dining with him, a celebrated Professor of Pathology from the University of Edinburgh. There was nothing concerning the result of disease within the human body

that he had not studied. Like the Dean, he was bent with years of sedentary work, his eyes peered under heavy brows, out of a face that was set on to his body at what seemed an acutely uncomfortable angle. Both men stared at the apparition which suddenly confronted them.

A totally naked human body.

The Dean's face darkened, his head shot out from between his shoulders.

Quite naked. It did happen. A rag. Of course. But the young fellow showed no shame—he was not even embarrassed. He was actually smiling—treating the incident with levity. Most unseemly.

Copper Top stood before them straight, white, and very naked, and continued to smile. It was a kindly smile. He felt the joy of his own elastic swift body, and he was sorry for these two poor crumped-up misshapen figures who blinked at him out of bleared eyes with such severity.

“Go to your rooms at once,” spluttered the Dean. “This exhibition is——”

What it was Copper Top never learnt, for a little group who had caught sight of him, shining whitely in the gloom of the archway, came charging down like a pack of hounds after a fox, yelling as they came. He slipped edgeways between the two black figures in front of him, and from the stairs above revelléd joyfully while the hunt precipitated itself into their arms and scattered with unbelievable speed.

The Dean and his friend, recovering from this second shock, moved out into the full moonlight, and were immediately confronted by another group, who supported Dr. Pendlebury, spent with emotion and much laughter, and Professor James Godolphin in his shirt-sleeves, hatless, queerly spotted, and still brandishing a stalwart

paint brush from which dripped a sinister looking liquid.

“Really men in their position——”

The Dean struggled with his feelings for a moment, then burst into wild cackles of laughter.

Laughter, overwhelming and comprehensive, held the whole party. They rocked, they wept, they ached with it. Pendlebury hid his face behind the Professor’s shoulder and sobbed.

The Dean was the first to recover himself.

“But I disapprove—I disapprove thoroughly,” he snorted, between recurring cackles. “You had better come back with me until you are fit to be seen. A little hot water, Godolphin, and I will lend you a coat and hat. Perhaps a glass of port——”

He led the way, ignoring, with what dignity he could, the various radiantly entertained faces that hovered in the background. The Edinburgh Professor returned with them. The Dean’s port was of a vintage that made it improvident not to accept every invitation to drink it. Besides he had not laughed so heartily for years. Not since he had been an Undergrad himself—certainly not since he married.

Over the port something of Copper Top’s history was revealed to the Dean. He listened with considerable interest, and imparted his views to Pendlebury while the other two discussed the disease of Civilisation with so much violence that had a murder been planned beside them they would have been perfectly unconscious of it.

“The boy’s peculiarities are entirely due to his bringing up,” pronounced the Dean. “It is quite enough to account for all of them. Mad—the whole thing—mad! And of course it is in the nature of a calamity for any lad to be brought up by a man with Godolphin’s views. A brilliant brain—amazing—but on the border line.”



The Dean lowered his voice and looked significant. "I understand the boy might do well if he were not so uncontrolled. A fine athlete too. I have sent for him to-morrow morning. The incident of the song in Chapel is serious—very serious. He must be dealt with severely on that account——"

"He had not the smallest idea of being irreverent, you know——" began Pendlebury.

"Then the sooner he has some idea the better," said the Dean rather sharply. Pendlebury must not think that because he laughed in that absurd way just now——

"Did you happen to hear him singing in the court this evening?" asked the Doctor.

"No," said the Dean. "I am aware he has a fine voice, but as you know I am not musical," he added somewhat coldly. He had rather a strong objection to what he called "The Artistic Temperament."

Copper Top turned up for his interview the next morning properly clothed. Don and Richard saw to it that he did. But all their efforts did not succeed in getting him there in time.

"You are five minutes late," said the Dean severely, glancing at his big gold watch.

"Yes, sir," acquiesced Copper Top.

He looked at him with sympathy. Of course, poor old chap, he was always having to be in time for something.

The Dean waited a moment for the apology which ought to have followed, but Copper Top continued to regard him with that queer, disinterested look of his, and presently the Dean actually began to feel uncomfortable. Perhaps it was because of that most improper reversal of the order of things that he spoke rather more forcibly than he would otherwise have done. Copper Top listened and was frankly bored. The Dean was talking

the most awful nonsense. "Light music in a sacred edifice." What did he mean by "light music"? "Desecration of God's House." "The sin against the Holy Ghost." What *did* he mean?

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" asked the Dean finally.

"No, sir," answered Copper Top, absentmindedly. He had been looking round. The room reminded him a little of 'Dophin's at the Little House, and there was a ripping lilac bush just outside the window. "I say, you know," he added cheerfully, "this is the jolliest sitting-room I've seen in Cambridge."

"Really!" exclaimed the Dean to himself.

But among the Dean's weaknesses his library was easily first. And after all one could not be too hard on a boy who has had the misfortune to be brought up by James Godolphin.

"Yes, yes," he said, rather as he might have spoken to a child. "But I must ask you to attend to what I am saying. I must have your apology and an assurance that you will not offend in this way again."

"Yes, sir," answered Copper Top. There were some delightfully busy buzzing bees in the lilac bush. He put out his hand, and those same bees, all honey laden, deserted their business and came booming in and settled on it.

The Dean instinctively got up to help, and had hurriedly arranged his handkerchief as a flail before he realised that the bees were on the friendliest possible terms with this most extraordinary youth.

"Of course—yes—Pendlebury had said——"

As it happened the Dean was interested in bees. Indeed he almost deserved the noble name of "Aparian." In his garden were two hives of the latest pattern.

Undoubtedly these were his own bees. He ceased to admonish and cautiously approached.

Ten minutes later the Professor, patrolling a lane outside an aggressively high wall (it had not looked well to be seen waiting in the court) heard on the other side of it a well-known voice, and another—yes—the Dean's! The conversation was certainly friendly, almost intimate. They were laughing——

The Professor unwrung his beard and chuckled. God bless the boy!

He went back to the Little House that afternoon, and late in the evening, so late that the earth was all folded up in darkness and a slender sickle moon hung in the sky, Copper Top walked in with Little Wolf and Terrier Puppy panting at his heels.

"I thought it best," he explained airily. "The Dean and I are the best of friends. I like him when he is with his bees. But if I stayed on just now I have the feeling that I'd be sure to sin against the Holy Ghost and upset him again. You see I don't know what that particular sin of yours is. Perhaps you'd better tell me, 'Dophin."

He sat in front of the fire, which blazed gloriously, and looked at the Professor with the very imp of mischief himself in his eyes. The dogs sat with their tongues lolling out one on each side of him and panted. In the kitchen Mistress Jones made haste with much food.

"I believe," said the Professor, "that the authorities are divided on that subject. But I think you ought to have stayed to the end of the term, old chap."

"Aren't you glad, really jolly glad, to have me back again?" asked Copper Top.

"Well—I'm afraid I am," owned the Professor weakly.

"Very well then!" said Copper Top, and disappeared



into the kitchen to the joy of Kathleen and the Sandy Puss Family.

The Professor listened to the pleasant sound of their greeting, wondered what was the best explanation to give the Cambridge authorities, and tried, manfully but ineffectually, to stifle that fountain of irresponsible well-being that the mere presence of Copper Top caused to bubble up within him.

## CHAPTER VII

THAT same spring Ishtar came out, and followed the usual routine of a high-born damsel. Was presented at Court by her mother, attended all the important Social Functions, was introduced to many celebrated people, and officiated as bridesmaid at the two most notable weddings of the Season. It was all very pleasant. She loved the dances in big beautiful rooms to the music of stringed instruments, the Opera on Gala days, the theatre parties, the Polo at Hurlingham, the gay race-meeting, and the excitement when one of her grandfather's horses was running. Above all she loved the big receptions where men who made history came and went, or the little dinners when they talked over affairs of state and party politics. It was exciting to feel that she was inside all these great matters of which the papers were full, and which the whole world watched anxiously.

It was none the less exciting because somehow it did not feel quite real. It was more as if they were all playing a game. The greatest game in the world, with the greatest prizes. But only a game. The counters they played with were the lives and the welfare of men. The future of the races of the world hung on how well or ill these people, who sat there eating and drinking and talking, played their game.

She watched them all with the wide wondering eyes of a child. And with always the knowledge behind her wonder that she too might take a hand in the game, just

as her mother and grandmother did. It fascinated her. She became more and more Marion Rosamund Helen, daughter of a long line of rulers and statesmen. Daughter of women who had ruled the strings of government, standing behind their men, for many a generation.

Her interest increased when Don MacClean began to talk of standing for Parliament. At Cambridge he was a Power. He had begun to feel his feet as a leader. The big men of his party were taking notice of him. He came up, as often as he could get away, to go with Ishtar to the dances, and in fragrant conservatory corners on terraces overlooking a London beautiful and mysterious under the spell of night, they talked together of what a man might do who served his country and loved her. And, watching with starry eyes at her mother's receptions, listening at the little dinners for the chosen, Marion Rosamund Helen had visions of what a woman might do.

Sometimes, during the week-ends at the Castle, when she went to bed in her old nursery, and the star above the tallest tree-top peeped in, the queer craving after Freedom stole back. Copper Top's Freedom. It was not compatible with the Great Game. That held you in a bondage from which there seemed no escape. Yet it fascinated her, even as that vision of Freedom fascinated her. There was so much to desire in this wonderful world, and she wanted it all. The Great Game meant Power. Power and prestige, and pleasure too. And Fate had made it so easy for her to take a hand in it. It had given her all the cards a woman needs. And with Don——

"After all, you know," she said to her grandmother, "there is no one quite like Don!"

Lady Condor more than agreed, and felt thankfully



secure. Her indiscretions had resulted in no calamity. Don, she knew, was only waiting until he left Cambridge. Ishtar would, without doubt, marry him, and carry on the traditions of her race. All was very well and satisfactory.

And then Ishtar had an attack of German Measles. Anything more stupid and annoying in the middle of the London Season could not well be imagined. And as Lady Condor asked, "Why German?" She would miss the Buckingham Palace private garden-party, and the Duchess of Northminster's ball to meet the Prince, and numerous other important fixtures, and, what Ishtar herself minded most of all, the Trinity College Dance in Cambridge Week. But, as Lady Hawkhurst said to Lady Condor, there it was.

Also the Doctor spoke quite seriously of the necessity for rest and country air, and Ishtar, lying restlessly awake through long nights in the hot lifeless air with the ceaseless cry of London all around her, began to long passionately for the cool of green woods and of running water. She announced that she would go down to the Little House, to Cousin James. She knew she would feel well directly she got to the forest. 'Dophin would love to have her.

Lady Hawkhurst agreed. It would really be a very suitable place for a convalescence. There was absolutely nothing to do there, and nowhere to go to. One would have to rest. Also neither the Professor nor Kathleen were likely to catch German Measles, and Copper Top was safely away at Cambridge. Indeed it seemed a most excellent arrangement.

Ishtar drove to Mentmore in the car. Down the Old Kent Road, thick with tramway lines and cars and dust and humanity; through Bromley, pretty and smug and

respectably over-smart; down the long Sevenoaks Hill into Tonbridge, quietly sleeping beside its river; and into the fair country beyond, gold with buttercups, white with may, and sweet with all spring's thousand scents.

At first she felt distinctly cross and irritable. In spite of her longing for fresh air and the quiet peace of wood and field, yet it really was sickening to miss so much. On Friday the Prime Minister was dining at Condor House. She loved to hear him talk, and he always talked a great deal. There was the Australians versus Gentlemen third test match at Lords. Don had been coming up to take her. There was the tennis at Lady Chantry's to meet Suzanne Lenglen and Moira Leicester's River Party. And above all there was the Trinity College Dance. She thought of the great marquee on the lawn outside the library. She had been looking forward so to dancing with Copper Top there. Don danced well, in the capable substantial way that he did everything. She liked the way he held you. It was so gentle, and yet you felt so safe. With half-closed eyes she thought of it, thought of all the lovely dances with him that she would miss. Two lines of poetry repeated themselves over and over again in her mind in time with the busy hum of the car:

"Be a man and fold me, with your arm.

Be a man and hold me, with a charm."

That was how it felt to dance with Don. With Copper Top it was different. He danced like the wind, as swift and as light, and he moved to some rhythm of his own. He hardly held you at all, but if you caught the rhythm there was no need, you moved as one with him, as swiftly and as lightly. It was wonderful then. He would not come to the dances in London. He did not do things

to please her as Don did. It hurt her a little, because she seemed to have no hold on him. He came and went in her life by chance, not by any effort of his own. She had been looking forward to that dance because he had faithfully promised to be there. And now—oh it was too stupid!

She was still fretting, and feeling on edge even with the singing shining spring-world, when she came to the Condor woods, thick with wild hyacinths under their canopy of young beech leaves, beyond the grey Downs.

Then, suddenly almost, she regretted nothing any more. There was music in the air. Adventure. A sense of something wonderful that would be revealed to her. Strangely she recaptured the long-ago charm of childhood's days. She laughed softly to herself as they drew up at the Castle. It looked forlorn in the sunlight with all its blinds down. The great gardens seemed waiting for their owners, for the laughter and movement of the week-end parties. They held no secret for her, no magic in their ordered beauty. But she loved the old place, it meant much to her, and it was here always that the Adventure began.

In a flash of inspiration she knew what she would do. She would take Jane, now living out a peaceful old age in the Castle meadows, and ride up to the Little House, just as she used to do when she was a child. She would try and live again in that World of Fairy Tales come True. Rose could come up with the luggage afterwards. She would go quite alone.

So she mounted the little white pony and rode down the lime avenue and up the white road and through the gateway beside the stile into the forest pathway. And as she rode things happened. All that she had been



thinking about as she drove down faded away curiously as into some dim past. Even the Great Game. Even Don. She regretted nothing. Something wonderful was going to happen. In the clearing, where the little bushes and baby rabbits grew, and dragon-flies shone above the streams, she put her cheek down against the rough silk of Jane's mane and whispered:

"We are out on an adventure, Jane. Something wonderful is going to happen in a minute."

And she did not feel in the least foolish, though she was grown up and capable of taking a hand in the Greatest Game in the world.

Among the trees it was very still. There was only the stir of Jane's patient busy little feet among the last year's leaves. The soft rustle made the silence more full of mystery.

On they went and up. The shadow of leaves played softly on them, the magic sense of adventure grew. It was strange, because before it had always belonged to times when she had been on her way to meet Copper Top. And Copper Top was far away at Cambridge. But—but was he? Suddenly she understood. And the wood was not still. It was full of whispering laughter. She laughed with it, the gay laughter of a child, and Jane whinnied softly.

The next moment Copper Top's arms were round them both, and Jane was muzzling her velvet nose with its funny long hairs against his breast.

"Copper Top! Oh, Copper Top, I thought you were at Cambridge!" The whole world blazed and danced together. She regretted nothing any more.

"I was tired of Cambridge," he answered, and laughed irrepressibly. "But of course it had to happen if you were coming. Star, isn't it wonderful? It is full spring.

It is the Perfect Hour. And we have it all to ourselves! Oh Star——”

They laughed together for sheer joy, and their laughter rippled with the sunlight and was part of the music of the woods. She slipped from Jane's back into his arms, and they walked up the path. She was not tired now. It seemed absurd that she should ever have been tired. Something radiant and vital ran in her veins. She slipped into the unison with the sun and the wind. Into the gay and careless happiness of winged things. She stood on the edge of Adventure. At any moment she might take the plunge into the world where everything was Free. And she was not in the least afraid. Had she really reached out at last into Copper Top's world? Or had he come down to hers. He was nearer to her than he had ever been before.

“Are you glad I have come?” she asked. It was an absurd question, but she longed to hear him say that he wanted her. If only he were a little, just a little, like other men——

Copper Top looked at her. “Can't you feel it?” he asked. And then for one whole minute the world went round. She came out of some great plunge, breathless, and asked no more questions. She did not want to know any more for a little while. It was enough. She asked about 'Dophin and Kathleen and all the creatures. The birds came flying to greet them. Running Water was at the gate, and King Edward, hoary with years but as full of curiosity as ever, poked a soft nose under every arm. The dogs gave that welcome to which no human being can attain, though the Professor came very near to it. The very fragrance of the sweet-briar hedge greeted her. Oh, it was good to be back!

They found lunch waiting for them in the cool dining-

room, its wide windows open to the massed colour and scent of the spring garden. The swallows flashed in and out and carried away food for their clamouring offspring under the eaves above. A bundle of Sandy Puss kittens, pleasantly full of warm milk, lay sleeping in a pool of sunlight. The Professor sat, with the boy and girl one on each side of him, and beamed. Indeed he was conscious of an exhilaration beyond any he had ever felt before, even with Copper Top. All sorts of ideas were passing through his mind, pleasantly exciting ideas, although vague as yet among the gay talk and laughter. But when lunch was over and the young people wandered into the garden, he stood in the window, smoking his pipe and watching them, and the ideas began to sort themselves out.

What a fool he had been to worry himself because Copper Top had come down before the end of term. Things did not just happen for no reason at all. Days in the forest with Ishtar—they were worth all the book-learning in the world. Of course they were. And he continued to watch the two fair heads bent closely above the flowers with the mingled feelings of glee and guilt, like a great schoolboy up to mischief.

The Hawkhursts would never have sent her had they known. Nothing should induce him to let them know if he could help it. He wondered if Ishtar would. Though even Marion would be vexed. The friendship had, in a way, always been against what she called her better judgment. He knew that. And yet she was the wisest woman he knew. It only showed what fools people were! Poor dear Connie! The Professor chuckled wickedly to himself. Well, those sort of people could not always have it their own way. There was some reason why these two had been thrown together almost



from their babyhood. Delightful thoughts began to shape themselves in the Professor's mind.

He dropped into the deep window seat. The sun was very hot. The scent of lilac and sweet-briar mingled gloriously. Copper Top moved out of the garden down the path into the forest, and Ishtar followed him. She sang as she went. A song that had no words, and needed none. The gracious lines of their easily moving bodies disappeared among the tall tree trunks, and the Professor dreamed on.

Copper Top's children. Copper Top's and Ishtar's. How amazingly wonderful they would be! What glorious creatures of fire and dew. Surely Dame Nature was taking a hand in this. If only People did not interfere. Copper Top's and Ishtar's children. What radiant embodiments of Life. Born into Copper Top's world of disinterested adoration. Cared for and blessed by all living things. At one with the rhythm of all that we call Nature. The wonder and beauty of that he visualised over-ran the Professor's power of thought.

They were wonderful days that followed. The Professor stood on one side, and moved with reverence, for there was holy ground about him.

For now, at last, Ishtar was there all the time. Copper Top would call to her at dawn, and she would come to her window all flushed with sleep like some rose-washed flower, her eyes still full of dreams among her tumblel hair. Something within her, just awakening with all awakening things, reached down to him, exquisite, fragrant, tangible.

Presently she would come out in her straight little frock of silk, that was like the sheath of a flower, and they would go into the fragrant fields where the cattle still slept under the trees in the lush grass. Sometimes

she bathed her feet in the dew. Little white feet that Copper Top loved. They were too beautiful to hide, he said.

They were wonderful days. Filled with magic moments almost unbearably sweet, with intimate rapturous understanding of every little flower growing perfectly in its own appointed place, of every wandering cloud and stream fulfilling its own purpose. They climbed to the topmost peak of the naked Uplands to greet the sun at his rising. They dreamed on the sleeping downs among God's little gardens of thyme and potentilla, or swayed among the scented breezes. They went down to the sea and swam out in the track of the sun with the white gulls circling and calling above them. They floated on the wide paces of water while the birds rocked on the waves with head and tail erect, for all the world exactly like the birds out of Ishtar's Noah's Ark had rocked on her bath long ago. They dawdled blissfully in flowered fields, and wandered through tracks and by-ways unknown to men, and little virgin woods, mysteriously still. And there were moon-washed nights of a thousand stars, when surely all Heaven sang, they were so bright, so strangely fair.

And dearest, most wonderful of all, the Creatures were no longer afraid of her. They admitted her into their small glad lives. All that she had dreamed of, and longed for, as a child, had come true. She sank deeper and deeper into Copper Top's world. Her own world grew dim.

She felt strange beautiful things were stirring all around her. Sometimes the whole singing, shining world became uncannily still. If Copper Top had not been there she would have been afraid. When that curious stillness came in the full blaze of the noonday sun she

was afraid. And it was then that Copper Top was most divinely tender; then that he drew her most surely into that oneness with him that was becoming closer and closer. But mostly she was conscious of a great and ever growing joy, that sang all the time. It was so wonderful that it took her breath away sometimes, and when they came back, like homing pigeons, to the Little House, she liked to sit a little with 'Dophin and hold his hand as the child Ishtar used to do. The Professor understood. The radiant joy that Copper Top brought into life, took his breath away too occasionally. Not that the Professor did not now believe that it was the birthright of all created things, but it was so long since man had sold his birthright for the mess of pottage that he called Civilisation that he had lost all true conception of joy. He recaptured a faint shadow of it when he loved and mated. But he spoilt and maimed and disfigured that as he spoilt and maimed and disfigured everything else he laid his bloodstained hands upon. For the Professor did not always forget his grievances against Man with a big M even in these halcyon days.

They slipped by, and neither Copper Top nor Ishtar counted them. The Perfect Hour hung fixed and flawless. Only the Professor became anxious. Would Copper Top let Ishtar slip away as he let all other things that men valued? Had he no use for love as men understood it, as he had no use for fame or power or wealth? His attitude towards Ishtar was, so far as the Professor could tell, that attitude of disinterested adoration with which he regarded the whole Universe. Would the lust of possession fail to touch him even here?

The Professor watched this strange courtship, if courtship it was, and saw visions and dreamed dreams. He remembered Pendlebury's words. "We have got



hold of something wonderful, and we can't get anything out of it."

Pendlebury had not thought of this. The possible nucleus of a race that would work in unison with all creatures. Why should not the great forces of Nature which Copper Top undoubtedly held communion with, which even the Professor himself, in his company, had dimly sensed, why should They not use this chance to bring back Humanity from its miry by-ways in the wilderness, back to its true heritage of happiness, back into touch with reality. Was Copper Top only just a falling star, lost for a while out of his own place in heaven, or was some purpose at the back of his coming?

A mad old man! That's what People would call him. Probably did call him. He was profoundly indifferent.

And then, measuring the huge and hideous forces of greed and lust and cruelty that Man has built and built through the ages to culminate in the great War, that War the very thought of which never failed to make the Professor see red with impotent rage, the fairy vision faded. What chance had things like Copper Top? And yet, after all, how strong he was against them. Always he had been afraid for Copper Top in the meshes of the great Machine, grinding mercilessly on its hideous way, and always it had failed to catch him. Always Copper Top had laughed and kept his own careless freedom. No touch of that horrible harrow had ever touched him.

But if he married—had children? How could he escape? It wasn't possible. Why had he been so foolish as to hope for it? Marriage? Marriage was one of the heaviest of all the chains men and women had forged for themselves so busily through the ages.

"What are you worrying about, 'Dophin?" asked Copper Top.

He leant, beautiful, serene, alert, against the trunk of the big oak, and smiled down at the Professor.

"Worrying?" repeated the Professor. "I'm not worrying!"

Copper Top laid his cool deft fingers on the Professor's and disentangled them from his beard.

The Professor snorted. Then he laughed.

"One has to worry if one is foolish enough to pick up a thing like you off a pathway."

"What is the matter now?" asked Copper Top, and he tidied the Professor's beard.

The Professor took a bold plunge into the centre of things.

"I was thinking about your getting married," he said.

"I will marry Ishtar if she will marry me," answered Copper Top. "Is that what you mean?"

Finding himself so decidedly in the centre the Professor was so startled that he had, for the moment, nothing to say.

"I don't like what you call marriage," Copper Top continued calmly. "It's like everything else beautiful, when People get hold of it they spoil it. But I suppose if Ishtar is my wife we must get married."

"Don't be silly, old chap. She wouldn't be your wife if you weren't married."

"You mean People wouldn't think she was," said Copper Top, and thought for a moment. "I wish you had picked Ishtar up in the pathway too."

"So do I!" ejaculated the Professor. "With all my heart."

"Though what would have happened to your beard with two of us——" said Copper Top, and giggled.

"As it is, we shall have to cope with all the Condors and Hawkhursts there ever have been or ever will be," groaned the Professor.

"Let's deal with them as they come," suggested Copper Top cheerfully.

"It won't be an easy matter you know, old chap. They expect Ishtar to make a big match. They will bring every bit of influence they have to prevent her marrying you."

"But they have no right to interfere," said Copper Top, and became suddenly serious. "To create a dwelling-place for the Life—about that, how can anyone decide for her? To that creation must go body, soul, and spirit, or it is sacrilege. I do not understand how anyone can dare to interfere. Only she can know——"

The words were halting, imperfect, but the Professor looking into the boy's clear eyes understood what he was trying to convey.

"To create you know, that is the one thing that really matters. One dare not create except faithfully. If the work is done amiss—that matters. Perhaps that is what is wrong with you all. I have been thinking about it. You create on a lower plane than anything else—for lower reasons——"

The thought struck the Professor like a flash of lightning. Physical passion—the creative force working through matter—a thing of the spirit then—of course—misused—prostituted. Was not the only wonder that the result was not even worse——?

"I can't explain very well," Copper Top went on slowly. "I can only use your words, and I never know what you really mean by them."



He paused and the Professor waited on a curious tip-toe of expectation. The boy's face was so strangely still. His voice fell to a murmur of sweet sound.

"Our words have Power," he said. "They open the doorways. They too create——"

And once more the Professor felt that the boy was linked up in some unusual way with his environment. With the hot sunlight in which he stood, with the little scented breeze that came wandering up from the garden, with all the murmuring song of busy happy life with which the spring afternoon was sweetly full.

Then Ishtar came, with the sun in the clustering softness of her hair, with dreams in her eyes, and royal gifts in her slender hands. They went away together and the Professor sat on alone and prayed. To what God he did not know, only that he had to pray.

If only he had picked Ishtar up too. Why had she come of a race that had tradition and prejudice in its very fibre. Links had been forged for her in the past, links that only one in a thousand has the courage to break when the right time comes. Had she the courage? Little white Ishtar, with her starry eyes under those pathetic eyebrows, who had cried on his shoulder long ago, "I love them both so much."

For there was Don. A good fellow who loved her too. He would fight for her, if the Professor knew anything of men. No one else had any right to interfere. The boy was right. Absolutely right. Ishtar should settle it with her own soul. Only that knew. But everyone would interfere—everyone. Even Arthur Fothersley. And Don—Don would fight. "So would I," thought the Professor, "in his shoes."

But Copper Top would not fight, that was quite clear. Very well then, he would fight for him—for him and

those wonderful children—grandchildren—— The Professor pulled himself up. But he would fight.

He went in and hunted up his bank book; his investments had prospered, he knew. His study of foreign politics had been useful. Those Chinese Bonds now. At any rate Copper Top would be able to give Ishtar all that even a woman of her rank needed. A strong and necessary weapon that to fight with. But there was his birth—they would look on it as an unsurmountable obstacle—or pretend to. People were such Fools. Copper Top was born of the spirit. He would bring to his mating birthright beyond the knowledge of man. If only Ishtar had the courage——

The next morning the mists lay thick and white upon the Downs at dawn.

“Let us go up. It will be most good,” said Copper Top when Ishtar came to her window at his call.

In the forest it was all a silver world. Pale stars were still glimmering through the trees, gold in a dull silver sky. Only the far away Downs were shrouded in mist, snow-white, ineffable.

They ran towards them swiftly through the creeping dawn. Across dew-drenched fields, up lanes sweet with pungent-scented herbs, and little hidden tracks unknown to men. They whispered as they went, laughed softly, lest they should waken in fear the sleeping things. They passed over the Uplands, where dewy cobwebs hung like silver veils over the young fern and heather, and plunged down, and down again, into the valley, past sleeping homesteads, and fields of springing wheat, and herds of sweet smelling cattle, until they came to the little wooded ravines at the foot of the Downs.

Here it was very dark. By the track wan primrose ghosts shone dimly, above, the elder flowers glimmered.

Yellow eyes gleamed, and a white owl joined them, flying on a level with Copper Top's head. If he had not been there Ishtar would have been terrified. The ravine was full of whispers—grey shapes that moved——

And then they were out again into the silver world, and began to climb up and up once more, with the springy down turf under their feet. Soon they moved in faint wreaths of mist, and before it wholly shrouded them Copper Top stopped and said, "Look back."

The world below seemed fashioned in silver and gold, or rather of both, most cunningly mingled. The stars had gone, the whole wide sky was clear, like some great mirror waiting to reflect, save for one thin blue spire of smoke that marked the Little House.

Copper Top smiled. "God bless 'Dophin," he said.

His fingers closed round hers, and they passed into the mist. It was impossible to see more than a yard ahead. They moved mysteriously, expectant. Now they passed through the scent of gorse, now under the drifting white of a may tree. Bushes appeared and disappeared, crouching, alert, about to spring, amazingly alive.

And then, quite suddenly, they were out in the sunlight, great floods of sunlight, under a blue sky, the bluest sky that Ishtar had ever seen. All round them the rolling ridges of the Downs glowed like great fairy opals, below, the mists surged, dazzlingly white, white as snow, and broke against the slopes like spray. The air was keen from the sea, and indescribably sweet with the scent of dew-drenched turf and thyme.

A sob caught Ishtar by the throat; she held out her arms. "It is like dawn in another world, above the clouds," she whispered.

A curious consciousness awoke in her. She felt that



she was really awake in the world for the first time. She had never really seen light or colour before. Everything was alive in a way she had never realised.

Her blood was pouring through her veins like fire—no—not fire—sunshine. Copper Top—she could feel it running through his veins too—it was running through everything—like some great river—to some great rhythm——

A skylark was singing up in the blue—sheep were cropping upon the distant slope—there were little butterflies——

Ah, it was the same dear world, more alive!

Copper Top stood erect, his face to the east, alight with exultation it outshone the sun. He was one clear note of praise, and with him went the whole song of the glad world.

A little strange keen wind came. The sun was very hot. The mists were drifting clouds of rose and gold far down the radiant slopes.

And above them—— Ishtar held out her hands and cried aloud. “Look! Oh, Copper Top! Look!”

Part of the light and yet distinct from it, unimaginably golden, great shapes moved, moved across the sky, across the face of the Downs, immense, serene. With them came an extraordinary wave of vital well-being, a wind of the spirit. From the golden wonder deep fontal eyes looked out and blessed.

And still the skylark sang, still on the slopes the cropping sheep shone white.

“Copper Top——”

He looked down at her and smiled.

“What were they?” she whispered.

“You saw them?” His voice was triumphant. “You saw. At last. Oh, Star!”

"What were they, Copper Top?"

"Some of the Sun Weavers I think. There are a great many different sorts, you know."

"And you see them all the time? Oh, Copper Top!"

"In places like this, nearly always. Those are very great beings though. There are many lesser ones. But it is very good that you saw them. I was beginning to think you never would. Now you know."

"But it is another world," she said. "Another world with different beings in it."

"It is all the same world; only you are seeing a little more of it, that's all," answered Copper Top. "Most people see so very little. If they call a thing Nature, they seem to think that's the end of it. It must be dull."

"But you never told me! You just left me guessing all the time."

"You cannot tell," said Copper Top. "It is no good. You will find you cannot tell either."

Ishtar moved towards a grey boulder and sat down. She looked out over the great spaces. The sun had folded the mists all away. The whole world lay clear and clean in the light and heat. The world she knew. And she had seen gold Presences upon its rainbow hills. It surpassed all the legends of Fairyland. This world—this dear world that she loved. In it you could companion those who wove the Sunlight and the Clouds and the Stars—and all the Flowers and the good brown Earth. You could walk with those who fashioned Lily Leaves and the slender spring Wheat.

She looked round her. Her eyes sparkled out of her eager face. Her breath came and went swiftly.

Copper Top laughed and the air danced. "Don't try," he said. "It was not with those dear grey eyes of yours you saw."

She looked up, and the colour crept hot and sweet into her face until it was radiant as a rose-bright cloud that draws to the sun. For in Copper Top's eyes she saw adoration, pure and unadulterated.

"Belovéd," he said. And again, "Belovéd."

And Ishtar rose up and went to him. Flushed and wonderful and as mysterious as the dawn, she went to him.

Copper Top took her into his arms with a shout of triumph, that rang through space until the wide Heavens chimed, and the Earth rocked in answer.

All her loveliness melted into his embrace. It seemed to her that they flashed together into one perfect flame.

"I love you," she said. And again, "Oh, I love you!" It was as if she were astonished, very sweet.

And with those words of magic power went the whole song of the Universe, gathered in ecstasy, from singing hill to singing sea, from singing flower to singing star.

"Belovéd," he said again. "Wonderful Belovéd. The Perfect Hour has struck, and to us is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory."

. . . . .

Down at the Little House the Professor girt his loins to guard the Gate. By the first post came letters for Ishtar. One addressed in Lady Hawkhurst's graceful writing, every letter of which spoke to the Professor of convention, propriety, the correct attitude, of all those things he, at this moment, hated most. He felt that he would almost be justified in burning it! There was another from Don. The Professor groaned. By no stretch of morality would he be justified in burning that.

The golden day went on, and he wandered round the place, and up and down his study, groaning and grunting and thinking revolutionary thoughts.



Even if they allowed the engagement—— His mind travelled back across the years to his own visit to Paradise. Margot's mother. What an awful woman. The relations she had insisted on producing—the Family friends—the visits she had insisted upon—the Meals! Good Lord! The Meals! Afternoon At Homes—Dinners—with music afterwards. Pianoforte pieces! They had all meant to be kind—of course—worthy people. But the hours they had eaten up. Hours torn out of Paradise. And the week before the wedding day. The Professor shuddered among his flowers. The wedding day. In London. London of all places! There had been a fog. Even the smell of the church came back to him. A clammy smell—mixed with a heavy scent of flowers—a sea of bald heads and feathered hats and bonnets . . . Margot's mother kissing him in the vestry—a wet kiss. . . . All through it Margot's bravely smiling, tired little face. The smell of wedding cake—from Buzzard's——

And then Margot asleep against his shoulder in a "reserved first-class compartment." Blue cloth cushions with a peculiar smell. The turmoil and bustle of the railway station, and the Station Hotel where they broke their journey. The bedroom—windows and bed both draped in an evil maroon coloured stuff. A carpet covered with sickly yellow-brown pools—a flare of gas in a thick globe. The odour of dead air—the window cord—the right hand one—was broken. The station atmosphere, engine smoke, damp soot—had poured in. "Quite comfortable. for one night. Must break your journey." He could hear his mother-in-law's fat comfortable voice across the long years.

How had Margot ever come! Margot—fair clustered hair—a flushed tired face—like a lost flower in that great

stuffy bed under the maroon festoons—— A grey white counterpane—there was an eiderdown that one didn't care to touch lying in a heap on the floor——

And they had been young—*young*—and the world had been full of hallowed starlit places, of moon-white fields, of wind-swept skies and the scent of great seas. He had not known then—but now——

And what could he do?

The wildest ideas crossed the Professor's mind.

If he could only get them married here—now—to-day. Special licenses—Registry Office—the Archdeacon—all flitted through his brain like a waking dream.

He had tramped to and fro, and up and down, until at this moment in his nightmare he had reached the Beech Grove. Any mad scheme seemed possible under that whispering canopy of translucent green. Mad? Rather beautiful understanding of things as they should be. In that lonely and enchanted spot he dared to believe that all should be well. Again he prayed. . . . He did not know to Whom, but he had to pray.

Copper Top and Ishtar found him still there when they wandered home in the warm dusk. They came with happy feet, with song and laughter, two mating things, young and very glad, and swept him into the radiant centre of their well-being. It was impossible with them, for the moment at any rate, to be pessimistic. The Professor let himself go, let himself revel in Copper Top's wild spirits, shared in the Perfect Hour for all he was worth, and shook his beard defiantly at the Future. But he did not give Ishtar her letters. He let them lie where he had thrown them in the morning. The outside world could wait for this one day—this day of magic—of faëry. He was swept with the children on a wave of exultation from some unknown sea, on into a moon-white night—

through a world of silver dreams—— Kathleen crooned softly in the kitchen, her song was like deep water flowing underground. The whole earth was bewitched, and the Professor with it.

Ishtar found her letters the next morning. Her heart sank with a horrible sick feeling when she saw them. Don—— She was going to hurt him. Hurt him pretty badly. Life was dreadfully difficult. Things wouldn't let one be really happy. She slipped his letter into her pocket unread, for she knew just how bad it would make her feel. And she would have to write and tell him. Why couldn't she run away from it all—with Copper Top—he would say "Why not?"

She read her mother's letter at breakfast under the oak tree, and asked, "What day of the week is it?" and no one knew.

"But how can we find out!" she exclaimed, and laughed. It was too ridiculous.

"Does it matter?" asked Copper Top.

Ishtar looked at her letter. "It is from Mother," she said, "and it is not dated. They are coming down to the Castle on Saturday, she says, for the week-end."

"The paper!" exclaimed the Professor, and remembered that he had not looked at it for a least three days.

Copper Top slipped in through the study window and brought out a little pile of newspapers. He handed them to Ishtar.

"Nobody has read them," she said, and looked guilty. "Copper Top, we must read them. At least, I don't matter so much, but everyone will be horrified if you don't know what is going on."

"I will see what is going on," said Copper Top, and spread out one of the papers and read. "Near East Crisis. Is War Inevitable?" "Near West. Looters



and Bridge-wreckers. More Murders." "Gruesome Thibet. Feeding the dead to Vultures." "Man and Wife with Throats Cut."

"Oh, Copper Top! you are picking out the worst!"

"No," protested Copper Top. "Those are all the headings in one top line."

He rolled the paper into a ball and threw it to Terrier Puppy, who tore it into small pieces with diligence.

"But the date?" asked the Professor.

The outside world was encroaching horribly. At any moment it might be upon them—rush in and overwhelm——

Ishtar had opened another paper. She looked up in dismay.

"It *is* Saturday," she said. "Saturday, June the First, June! And Saturday. They will be here to-day!"

She picked up her mother's letter and read it again.

"I am to join them, and we will all go back to London together on Monday. Oh, Copper Top!"

"Do you want to go?" he asked.

"No. Oh, no!" She looked at him with eyes so sweet and yet with so much fear in them that the Professor turned away. He felt that he had surprised something sacred unawares. He moved softly across the grass; the dogs leaped about him as he went. Only the martins still circled round on their long, lovely wings, and the pigeon, cooing on Copper Top's shoulder sleepily replete with much breakfast, did not stir.

Copper Top looked into those sweet eyes, and spoke softly. "You are like the little streams that sing all night to the moon," he said. "You are like the little waves that sing all day to the shore. Just so sweet."

She held out both her hands to him across the table. He took them in his, turned them palms upwards, and

dropped a butterfly kiss first into one, then into the other. She lifted up her face, softly aglow, and he touched with his lips, just as lightly, the flower-cup of her mouth.

“What is it, Belovéd?” he asked.

“My dear,” she answered. “My dear.” And the old-fashioned word took on its old sweet meaning as she spoke it. “Hold me, keep me, don’t let me go. Whatever happens, don’t let me go.”

Then he answered a strange thing, and it seemed to her a hard one. “I cannot hold you. I cannot keep you. You must come of yourself and stay of yourself. There is no other way.”

## CHAPTER VIII

LADY CONDOR sat under the beech trees on the Castle lawn surrounded by West Highlanders and the weekly papers. She always kept the latter for her week-end in the country. It was the only way during the season, she said, to keep yourself properly *au fait* with the news of the world.

Presently Mr. Fothersley came trotting across the grass to pay his Saturday call. She was immersed in the *Spectator*.

"Have you read this article, 'What to do with our boys?' " she exclaimed when he announced his presence. "The title is of course all wrong, for it seems there is nothing to do with them. And you know it was only a few years ago that everyone was told that there would not be enough boys, and I do feel sorry for all the poor things who started having them again from patriotic motives, you know, when they had begun to leave off for good. Dear Mimi told me only the other day that if she had known what the income-tax was going to be she never would have been patriotic—twins, you remember, and one was a girl—and I do hope she won't see this article, because it will upset her very much."

Mr. Fothersley cleared his throat delicately and changed the subject. He continued to deprecate the present-day habit of alluding to certain things before members of the opposite sex, and he made a point of never encouraging it, even in Lady Condor.



"And who does your party consist of this week-end?" he asked.

"Oh, just ourselves," answered Lady Condor. "Connie and Hawkhurst, of course. He is out in the car looking up one or two useful people. The chance of an Election seems remote again, but one never knows, does one? And I do dislike being cordial to people just before one seems imminent, if you haven't been before, you know. Dear Richard is shaping very well, they tell me, and getting on with his speaking at the Union. He came up last week on purpose to meet Northallerton, and really you know the boy is very like his grandfather in manner. Northallerton remarked on it, and seemed pleased."

"I take a very serious view of the situation," announced Mr. Fothersley. "Very. I had hoped great things when Northallerton definitely assumed the Leadership of our Party. A man of action, I thought——"

"Such a pity he married that terrible——" began Lady Condor, but Mr. Fothersley was not to be denied.

"But he does nothing," he continued. "Simply nothing. And things are going from bad to worse—from bad to worse," Mr. Fothersley repeated emphatically. "And our own class are turning against us. I am horrified, absolutely horrified, by James Godolphin's speech the other night at the Portfolio Club. I believe that little man, Pendlebury, asks him on purpose. He has always encouraged James. It was reported even in respectable newspapers, too. There is no single thing that should be sacred to the heart of every Englishman that he does not vituperate. To read that speech you would think there should be no Poor. And have we not the authority of Holy Writ that the Poor——"

"And if we were all rich who would get into the Kingdom of Heaven? though I always believe that

everyone will, but it is all very puzzling, is it not, and nobody pays any attention to James really," ended Lady Condor soothingly. "He makes them laugh, that's all. I laughed myself—though I knew I ought not to—but one cannot take James seriously—of course not. And have you seen anything of Ishtar this week?"

"As a matter of fact," Mr. Fothersley began, and stopped. He looked a little confused. "You see Marion, I have never had German measles, only the ordinary kind, and I felt it would be unwise to run any risks."

"Ah," said Lady Condor. "I had not thought of that. One does catch things even at our age. I even heard of someone of eighty the other day who died of cutting a wisdom tooth. But the child is out of quarantine now, and I have been expecting her all the afternoon. We are taking her back to town on Monday. It's been so vexing that she has missed so much of her first Season."

"She has been much admired I am sure," said Mr. Fothersley.

"Not a *débutante* to compare with her," said Lady Condor, and beamed. "She has brains too, the child. I think she has a great future before her. Northallerton and Crowley and Desmond all raving about her."

"Desmond!" ejaculated Mr. Fothersley with horror.

"Well, you know what I mean. For him to like to talk to a girl . . . it is a great compliment, even though he is——" the eloquent wave of her hands described exactly what he was. "Of course she will marry Don. He is only waiting till he leaves Cambridge, but it is quite understood——"

"A most suitable match," agreed Mr. Fothersley. "And Ishtar will make a lovely mistress of Storne. Most suitable."

"He is taking up a political career," Lady Condor

went on with complete satisfaction. "Though it is not what it was—no—and I am doubtful if he will really be a success in it. He is rather too uncompromising, you know. To be a success—— Who is Cartwright bringing out to me? I said 'not at home'—and where are my glasses?—thank you, dear Arthur." She settled them on her nose and exclaimed, "Why, it is James Godolphin! And what has he done with the child? Perhaps she has gone to take her things off. I am afraid he has something aggressive to tell us. He is in that mood. I know his walk. I do hope—— Where is Ishtar, James?" she called.

"Out riding," the Professor called back.

He advanced with his beard at a truculent angle until he was within speaking distance. Then he said, "With Copper Top."

"Copper Top!" exclaimed Lady Condor, and then more faintly, "Copper Top! But he is at Cambridge."

"At Cambridge," echoed Mr. Fothersley in a whisper.

"Not at all," said the Professor. "He is at home. May I sit, Marion? It is a very hot day."

He took off his hat, mopped his forehead, got a firm grip on his beard with his left hand, and looked at Lady Condor with a stiff smile.

"Copper Top and Ishtar are engaged," he said mildly.

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Fothersley. He disliked this use of the name of the Almighty, but there are moments——

"Shut up, Arthur," said the Professor fiercely, and waved an angry hand at him. "Marion——" He stopped, at a loss for his next words, for it was a distinctly alarming thing to have stricken Lady Condor dumb. Besides, her face was strangely puckered—quivering.



"It is all my fault," she said, after a moment of painful silence. Her pince-nez had fallen off into her lap. She looked at the Professor with reproachful eyes.

"Nonsense, Marion!" He picked up the glasses and put them back on to her nose. It was a moment of agitation. "It has nothing to do with you. It is Fate. Those two children are made for each other."

"Pchta!" said Mr. Fothersley, or something like it, and then, feeling that he had been a little rude, turned it into a cough.

"I came to see Hawkhurst, first," the Professor went on, ignoring the interruption, "to explain what he may not know, that Copper Top is, from a monetary point of view, in a position to ask Ishtar to marry him."

Lady Condor waved two distracted hands, scattering various belongings on to the grass. "James, even you must understand what this is to me. What it will be to us all."

"I'll be hanged if I do, in the sense you mean," replied the Professor. But he did. Was he not one of them? "I suppose it's because you don't know whether he had a father who drank or a mother who——"

"James," interposed Mr. Fothersley again. "I beg of you——"

"I beg your pardon, Marion," said the Professor, for this was not at all how he had meant to set to work. That fool Arthur, with his ejaculations, had upset him. "Look here, my dear, I *did* think—well—that at any rate you would not be *against* us. You know the boy is clean and straight and fine as gold. He's got all the money any reasonable woman who cares for him can want——"

"It isn't that, James."

"Then I suppose it is because I picked him up off the forest pathway. But isn't he physically as perfect a

thing as you've ever seen? Isn't he clean and beautiful of mind beyond the ordinary? Isn't that testimony that he comes of earth's first blood somehow? What more do you want?"

"A name, James!" said Mr. Fothersley, and jumped an agile three feet as the Professor turned on him.

"If you say another word, Arthur, upon my word I'll wring your neck," he said savagely. "Marion, if you could see those two young things. The beauty—the wonder of it. The joy! Will you come back with me, and see them, before they come down here, and you all do your best to smash it? Will you just come and talk to them?"

Lady Condor laid a kind hand, that shook a little, on his arm.

"Dear James, I must not run into temptation. All that is sensible in me tells me that this thing is out of the question. It is against all our traditions, against all Ishtar's traditions—it would never do. I must do what is the right thing as I see it. Let us go and tell Condor and see what can be done. I think he is looking at the pigs. Let us find him quickly." She got up, voluminously helpless. "Poor dear Connie may come out any minute. I really cannot break it to her. My handkerchief—thank you, dear Arthur. No, I don't want anything else. I cannot help feeling, James, that you ought to have told us that Copper Top was at home, we should never have allowed——"

She billowed across the lawn by the shortest route to the Farm holding the Professor firmly by the coat sleeve. His old resemblance to a guilty poacher had returned, and he not only looked the part, he felt it. But he was going to fight for the boy all the same.

Mr. Fothersley remained behind and smoothed his

ruffled feathers. No doubt James would apologise when he was less excited. In the meantime Mr. Fothersley collected Lady Condor's scattered fragments and thanked Heaven that he was a bachelor. Then he withdrew, temporarily, to a more secluded part of the garden. He, too, had no wish to break the news to poor dear Connie.

"The thing is out of the question," said Lord Condor, in a quiet voice that sent the Professor's heart down into his boots. "The only thing is, how best to make the young people understand that."

The Family were sitting in conclave in his library. Lady Hawkhurst was really agitated, a most unusual thing. Lord Hawkhurst was on the verge of losing his temper and saying things that he knew he would afterwards regret. Lady Condor had thrown her load of distress and anxiety on to her husband's capable shoulders, and was admiring the masterly way in which he was dealing with things.

"I cannot understand Ishtar not recognising it!" Lord Hawkhurst exclaimed irritably. "It isn't even reasonable to expect——"

"Love isn't reasonable. It's the very reverse," said Lord Condor. "But you must be reasonable, my boy. Open opposition will only do harm."

"Nothing shall induce me to sanction it," said Lady Hawkhurst, and fixed the Professor with an angry eye. "Allow the child to ruin her life at eighteen! And what age is Copper Top? Nineteen! From that point of view alone, I refuse my consent."

"It is the correct age to marry and have children," said the Professor.

Lady Hawkhurst looked down her nose. Her lips assumed an expression of disgust.



"Is it necessary to be coarse?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon," answered the Professor. "I did not know it was coarse to marry and have children."

Lord Condor wagged a pacifying hand. "All this is beside the mark," he said.

The Professor raised his eyebrows. For the life of him he could not help it.

"Look here, James," continued Lord Condor. "You're one of us, after all. You know as well as I do that this match is impossible. We're all sorry, but there it is. Now are you going to do the right thing, and help us to let the young people down as easily as possible, we don't want any imaginary broken hearts about, or are you going to—well"—he smiled at the Professor delightfully, "be troublesome, Jimmy?"

But the Professor refused to be wheedled. "I'm going to be troublesome," he answered. "I approve of the match. I think it is for Ishtar's good as well as Copper Top's. Do you any of you suppose that I don't consider Ishtar's happiness?" He glared at them. "Of course I do. And it is the last thing you are all considering. You are considering quite other things."

"Not considering my own daughter's happiness!" exclaimed Lady Hawkhurst. "Really, I have never been so insulted in my life!"

Her husband laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Leave it to father," he murmured, and watched him with admiration. What a man on a committee!

Lord Condor was smiling at the Professor more genially than ever.

"Come! Come!" he said. "That's a bit sweeping, isn't it? But if you won't help us, James, you'll understand if I ask you to leave the room while we consider what is to be done."

"Certainly," said the Professor, and got up at once. He looked at Lady Condor, but she avoided his eye. He knew she could be silent when her husband was in charge of an affair, yet her silence was the most sinister thing about the whole conclave. He had counted on her support. Also he was conscious that he had not been so tactful as he had fully intended to be. But he made a last effort, and with dignity.

"Before I go," he said, "let me tell you that the boy and girl are very deeply in love, and ask you to remember that this is no sudden attachment; it has dated from their childhood. The boy is a good boy, good, straight, and clean, absolutely. He is in a position to marry. On the day he marries I settle £5,000 a year on him. No doubt she could marry a richer man, but we are not usurers. He has a great future before him, so I am assured, in the world of music."

Lady Hawkhurst lifted her eyes to the ceiling, and permitted herself an audible sniff.

"You have really nothing against him," the Professor went on steadily, "except that you do not know his parentage, and I would ask you to consider all that I have said in the balance with that objection, before you decide to destroy the most wonderful happiness that I have ever seen."

A sigh of relief ran round the little circle as he left the room. They all moved, almost unconsciously, into easier positions. His words had made no impression on them whatever. They might put all the things the Professor had mentioned into the balance with Copper Top's unknown origin, and it would easily outweigh them all.

"Besides," said Lord Condor, "he's only three-parts human. You don't know how a fellow like that may develop. How much more peculiar he may get."

"We all of us get more peculiar as we go on," murmured Lady Condor. "Look at——"

"I do think," interrupted Lord Hawkhurst, "that you were looking for trouble, Connie, when you let Ishtar go and stay up there."

"But Copper Top was at Cambridge, or at least he ought to have been," wailed Lady Hawkhurst. "Why wasn't he?" She looked round accusingly.

"I think you might have found out," complained her husband. "Didn't Ishtar mention that he was there in her letters?"

"Of course not, dear. I should have fetched her away at once if she had. She only wrote post cards. I've always hated them——"

"You can't help these things," interposed Lady Condor. "If they're going to happen they do. Why, I remember——"

"The only thing for it is the Fabian Policy," said Lord Condor, who had been gazing up at the ceiling. "We've got to be careful. Ishtar's too like Ricky for it to be safe to drive her, and James is capable of any iniquity. As for the boy, I take it he's more or less an unknown quantity."

"But what are we to do?" asked Hawkhurst. "We can't let them be engaged."

"Not officially," said Lord Condor. "That is just the point. They must not be formally engaged for at least a year. And I should arrange that the rest of the season is spent in London, then Scotland, and so on. Invite the boy, of course. It is only fair that we should ask that he takes part in the life that she is accustomed to—and will expect to lead. As far as possible"—Lord Condor stroked his chin thoughtfully, and looked at his daughter-in-law—"I should arrange not to bring Ishtar down here."



"And you think——?" began Lady Hawkhurst. Was it possible that she could look cunning?

Lord Condor smiled. "I've seen Tarzan in London," he said. "He looks like a moulting bird."

"I don't like it very much," said his son. "I'd rather a good deal stop the whole thing at once."

"So would I. So we could have two generations ago. But now—well, we can't. Therefore I think this is the best and wisest course. It will give Ishtar a chance. I doubt very much if she would really like to live her life in the green wood under the stars sort of way. While you are in the throes of first love—perhaps. But for all your life—no. Anyway, it is only right to give the child time—and," his eyes twinkled, "young Don a chance."

He heaved his great weight round, and looked again at his daughter-in-law.

"You can let Ishtar know, tactfully, that it's not exactly what we would have chosen. But no active opposition, mind, not a shadow, and not a word against the boy."

"I suppose it is the only thing," said Lady Hawkhurst, with the resignation of despair. She looked at her husband, who nodded.

"I can't think what young MacClean's been up to," he said gloomily.

"He was waiting till he left Cambridge to ask her again——" began Lady Condor.

"Again?" asked Lord Condor.

"He asked her about a year ago," explained Lady Hawkhurst. She looked at her husband. "I told you——"

"Yes. It was too soon, of course. She was only seventeen——"

"The age your grandmothers all married at," said Lady Condor. "But it's no good talking. Everyone did everything for the best. We always do. But what's going to happen happens all the same, and there it is. Though I don't know that it's any comfort, dear Connie——"

She laid a kind hand on her daughter-in-law's arm, and just then the door opened rather slowly and Ishtar stood there smiling at them. It was a dear little smile, shy and sweet and a little frightened, and they all felt like conspirators. They had an uneasy feeling that they looked like them. Lord Condor cleared his throat somewhat loudly.

"Cousin James has told you." She moved a few steps into the room and stopped, looking from one to the other. Rose-flushed, star-eyed, wrapped in a halo of happiness, her beauty struck them as some new thing.

"Upon my word, too good for any man," thought Lord Condor. He put out a friendly hand, and she came and stood beside him, facing the others.

"I hope you don't all mind very much," she said shyly. "I know it isn't just what you would like best. But it is there—there doesn't seem anything else in the world."

"Well! Well!" Her grandfather patted her hand. "You stay and talk it over with your father and mother. Where's Tarzan? I suppose you've got him somewhere handy?"

Ishtar blushed, and smiled divinely.

"He's on the lawn, just outside," she said.

"I'll go and have a talk with him." Lord Condor heaved himself out of his chair, patted the top of her head, and progressed, in his slow, soft way, out to the

lawn, where he found Copper Top seated cross-legged on the grass surrounded by adoring West Highlanders.

He did not appear to be suffering from any anxiety, and certainly from no shyness. He scattered the dogs and came to meet Lord Condor, smiling and unembarrassed. He did not really understand everybody's attitude, but he was used to that.

Lord Condor greeted him cordially, and, walking to and fro on the lawn, expounded the views of the family to him. Copper Top listened politely and with such complete silence that at last Lord Condor began to wonder what it meant. There was an odd twinkle in the boy's eyes, a queer little twitch at the corners of his mouth, that almost suggested amusement.

"You see, marriage is not a thing you can afford to make a mistake about; it's a life business, and a difficult one, too," Lord Condor wound up what he felt was becoming something in the nature of a speech. "So I hope you and Ishtar will agree to wait as we suggest."

He looked at Copper Top, inviting a response.

"What for?" asked Copper Top in his direct way. "Until we have fallen in love with each other? But we have done that. You need not be in the least anxious about it. Perhaps though"—the little twitch at the corners of his mouth became more pronounced—"perhaps you are thinking that if we go through a year of this uncomfortable arrangement we shall fall out again. That is really what you are driving at, isn't it?" he ended quite simply.

"No! No!" exclaimed Lord Condor, telling the conventional lie before he realised that he was lying. Something in Copper Top's direct gaze brought the fact home to him. Confound the fellow. Why couldn't he take the pill in the jam provided for it. Even now he



could not bring himself to throw his birth, or rather his want of it, in his face. A deuced unpleasant thing not to know who your father was.

"I can assure you it is a very usual arrangement when the two young people who want to get married are still in their teens," he said.

"When the older people don't approve of it," added Copper Top quietly.

Confound the fellow again! If only he would not look amused! Lord Condor realised that he was actually at a disadvantage, and gave up being diplomatic.

"Look here, Tarzan, to be quite frank with you, we would rather this had not happened. It isn't that we don't like you personally. We do." He laid a kind, heavy hand on Copper Top's shoulder. "But as a husband for Ishtar, well, frankly, no!"

Copper Top smiled, suddenly and delightfully. "Of course you don't," he agreed. "It is better not to roll things up. I am at a big disadvantage as it is. It's not quite fair not to be honest with me." The amusement had quite gone from his face now. He spoke seriously, and his manner had a certain gracious dignity. "You will all of you do your best to persuade Ishtar to do what you want. That is your way. You think you have the right. With me it is different. I shall not try to make her do what I want. That is a thing I must not do. To me it seems wrong. It would spoil everything. So you see," he smiled at Lord Condor with a suspicion of mischief, "there was no need for you to worry to tell me all that——"

"No—no—I see," said Lord Condor, and laughed. His hand tightened affectionately on the boy's shoulder. He was honestly sorry for the lad. "My dear fellow, I beg your pardon for my well-meant efforts."

Copper Top stopped their walk, turned, and faced him.

"I want to marry Ishtar now—now," he said. "It is the middle of the Perfect Hour. It is the Time. And if she will, you have no right to stop her."

His face was alight with something that Lord Condor had never seen before, though he recognised it. Pure passion. The Flame upon the Altar.

"Upon my word," he said afterwards to his wife, "we may be thankful he isn't playing for his own hand. But it's queer—deuced queer——"

It was at that moment Ishtar came out and joined them, flushed and smiling and very sweet. She took her grandfather's arm and gave it a little squeeze, then moved to Copper Top's side. As Lord Condor turned away, he heard her say, "Dear, they have been so nice about it. They only want us to wait—just for a little."

He could not resist looking back. The light had gone out of the boy's face.

The Family insisted that Copper Top should stay for the rest of the day. Dinner was a long affair. The close air, the smell of food and wine, the courses that came and went, he disliked it all. The conversation was a little difficult. Even Lady Condor's lacked its usual savour.

Copper Top had had an interview with Lady Hawkhurst. A terrible affair. It seemed to him that she had beaten five words into his brain with horrible persistence. "What Ishtar is accustomed to." "What Ishtar is accustomed to." They jingled in his mind all through dinner. Ishtar was to return to London with them on the morrow. He was to follow as soon as he liked and stay as long as he could. He already felt like that moulting bird to which Lord Condor had likened him.

After dinner he and Ishtar went into the garden among

the moonlit flowers. He drew in long breaths. How cool it was, how good. "What Ishtar is accustomed to."

"You do like this best, Star?" he asked.

"Of course I do." She looked like a moonbeam maiden herself. "But it's fun in London, too. You'll like it when you get used to it all." She felt him shrink a little. "Oh, Copper Top, you will come. I'll get down to the Little House—the dear Little House—as often as I can. But you will come?"

She clung to him, lifting her face to his. She wanted—what did she want? He held her lightly—lightly as a flower he touched her offered lips.

"Belovéd." His voice was grave, charged with deeper feeling than Copper Top usually showed. "Belovéd, come away with me now. Come back to the forest. All the world is ours to-day. But nothing stays where it is. That is why to-day matters so much. Will you come?"

"Now?" Ishtar exclaimed. "Oh, Copper Top, I couldn't!" she repeated. "It would hurt them all so dreadfully. It would be a dreadful thing to do. You don't understand, dear. They love me too. I couldn't hurt them like that."

She looked earnestly into his face. It was very pale, and the light had gone out of it.

"I do want to," she said. "I do want to. But it is only for a little while. Please don't mind very much."

She folded her hands against his breast, looking up at him, and he looked down into her eyes for quite a long time very steadfastly.

"I shall not mind if it is what you wish," he said.

That night Ishtar leant out of her window and watched the star above the tallest tree-top for quite a long time, and wondered—wondered if she wished—it was silly of



course—but did she? Wish that he *had* minded—just a little.

If he had carried her off—so that she could not help it—so that it wasn't her fault—like they did in Fairy Tales——

The very fancy made her feel warm and lovely as she slipped into bed.

## CHAPTER IX

THERE are moments in the lives of most of us, when all the armour of the spirit in which we trusted is smitten from us, and we are left naked to cope with the beast from which we came. Such a moment fell upon Don Mac-Clean as he read Ishtar's letter.

It had not been easy to write, and one effort after another had gone into the waste-paper basket before she had finally, in despair, posted the almost child-like, and very badly written little effusion that he found on his breakfast table on the morning he was leaving Cambridge.

"Copper Top and I have found out that we love each other, and although we are not to be engaged just yet, publicly I mean, I want you to know, dear Don."

At first he stared at the bald little sentence without being able to grasp its full significance. He even helped himself mechanically to coffee, and eggs and bacon, in a curious numb sort of way, before that which lay in wait fell upon him.

Then he pushed his chair back from the table slowly, staring blindly in front of him, and felt suddenly physically sick.

All the training of his life, all the influences, not only of his own past, but of the past laid deep down in him by his forefathers, had made for the suppression of feeling. He had refused to recognise his passions, as unworthy things, had banked down his fires without in the least

suspecting their violence. And now, suddenly and without warning, they flared up, and destroyed in one fierce cataclysm the bulwarks of heredity and training. Stripped and helpless in their grip, passion took possession, and scourged him body and soul.

He thought of Ishtar as he had never allowed himself to think before. In some vague way it had seemed like a want of respect—of reverence. Now, the desire to possess her, which he had hidden in the most sacred recesses of his being, came out and devoured him. He realised in bitter fullness the seductive appeal of her fair pathetic beauty. Realised it in another man's arms. God! Oh God! And he was impotent! He could do nothing—nothing. Oh God! Oh God! He stretched his arms out, the fingers of his strong hands drawn up. It was an unconscious movement, but horrible, sinister. His face was wrung with agony. He was white as the dead. The sun-brown on his skin had a curious look—artificial. He struggled violently for the last remnants of self-control, then, utterly overmastered and broken down, he buried his ravaged face in his hands and sobbed.

He did not know how long he sat there, his soul a naked, helpless thing in a vortex of Desire, Jealousy, and Hatred. Footsteps had come and gone, there had been various knockings at the door. Presently these assumed some violence, and, as it were from some long ago past, he heard his name shouted.

Why couldn't they leave him alone? What did they want? It was Richard Moresby's voice. That long ago past began to assert itself. Richard? Yes—he remembered. They were to have travelled together. He was going to stay with the Condors—the train—— He looked at his watch. It was past eleven. The train—the train went——



With a wrench he pulled himself together as well as he could. He began to feel ashamed—almost guilty. The everyday world rolled back into its place. He hated it.

He crossed the room and unlocked the door.

“My dear chap——” Richard burst in, then stopped, staring first at the untouched breakfast, then at Don. “What’s the matter?” he ended, on a note of astonishment.

Don sat down again. He felt cold and sick.

“That,” he said, and moved Ishtar’s letter across the table.

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Richard, as he read. “Copper? Why, it’s absurd!” He looked up. “I say, old fellow, then you——”

“Didn’t you know? I should have thought it was pretty obvious,” said Don, bitterly.

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Richard again. He gazed at his friend in dismay. “Does—does Ishtar know? And she wants to marry old Copper? But it’s ridiculous! One likes him all right—but for Ishtar to marry—— And she might have had you——”

He pulled a chair forward and sat down with his legs across it and his arms folded on the back. There he continued to look comically perplexed. It was pretty rotten seeing old Don bowled over like this. A suspicion that he had been crying Richard shovelled away into the background with loyal haste. It was queer how a fellow could break up over a girl. And Don—Don? Why any girl ought to be thankful—— Ishtar didn’t know what she was thinking of—he would speak to her——

“I say, old chap, what are you going to do?” he asked at length.

“Do!” echoed Don. “What is there to do? She cares for him. They’re engaged—between themselves.” He

writhed at the pictures his words conjured up. "I can't kill him, though I'd like to."

Richard's dismay increased. His idol was showing himself in an altogether new light. He didn't quite like it. He would have been less astonished, and certainly less concerned, if the statue of Henry the Eighth had descended from its niche and held forth in this style.

"I mean, what are you going to do now?" he asked. "The train goes at twelve and it's past eleven now. You aren't packed, are you? I'd better shovel your things together."

Don pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"I can't come with you," he said.

"But—but what will you do then?"

"Go back to Storne." He made an effort to pull himself together, and managed a stiff smile. "I'm afraid I've been making a fool of myself, Dick. Don't you bother. I'll catch the night mail. I'll be all right."

"Look here," said Richard. "They'll never let Izzy marry him—never—you take my word for it. But I suppose you've done with her now——"

"Done with her!" cried poor Don. "Why—I'd—I'd give everything I have in the world for her. I'd——"

His passion caught him by the throat again and choked him.

"Well then——? And they'll never allow it. I wouldn't. Why—why he's a—not a changeling—you know what I mean—a foundling—that's it!"

"It doesn't make any difference. She cares for him. Don't you see—that's what matters."

Don moved to the window. He had been prowling restlessly about the room, kicking everything that came in his way. The window was full of sunshine. Odd insects were buzzing. The subtle intrigant scent of wisteria on

a hot day filled the air. Again the fierce desire for Ishtar tore him. The fragrance of her assailed him even as the scent of the flower. He turned fiercely.

"I'd kill him with my two hands if it would do any good," he said. "But it wouldn't."

Richard moved a little, uncomfortably. Old Don really was going a bit far. It *was* queer how a fellow could go on about a girl. Lost their heads like anything over them. But old Don—and Izzy—what a little idiot! Girls——

"Girls are queer things," he said. "I don't think they really know what they want. She'll find out she's made the deuce of a mistake. You see if she doesn't."

Don, listening to these well-meant efforts at consolation, was suddenly overwhelmed with a sense of nausea. Oh, how futile it all was! How utterly dreary. The cold breakfast. The forlorn room stripped of the trimmings that had made it his. And Richard sitting there with his pleasant face looking curiously unfamiliar.

The joy and interest of life had been suddenly stricken out of it. Everything filled him with a sense of disgust. There was nothing in the whole wide world that he wanted to do—that would give him the smallest pleasure to do. There was nowhere that he wanted to go. An overwhelming blank emptiness possessed his soul.

He must move—must get away somewhere by himself. With a sense of relief the thought of his own home came to him. The wide stretches of bare hillside. The babbling streams. The cool, clean greyness. His dogs—his dogs? Yes. The companionship of human beings would be unbearable. But Jock and Betty and Pickle. He saw their rapturous welcome, their eager, faithful eyes—felt their mute, humble sympathy. Oh, he wanted them.



So Don went to his own home, and fought his battle wandering with his dogs over moorland and mountain, among the grey boulders and the curlew's call.

The great stone mansion, the walled garden, the bracken-carpeted woods, were all full of memories. Memories of Ishtar. Everywhere visions of her rare pale beauty shone upon him—beyond his reach. The old dreams would come back and he would have to tear himself away from them or go mad. He had been so sure of her. Once he had been anxious, just for a little while, but of late he had been so sure. Life had been such a ripping thing. And the future even more wonderful and desirable than the present. The plunge from the heights to the depths was well-nigh past bearing. He began to understand how men did the seemingly incredible things that you read about in the papers.

Out in the great spaces of moor and hill it was more endurable. He walked and walked until he was so tired that he had to sleep. He grew to dread, a little less, the early morning waking, before even the summer dawn had come, into a horrible new world in which he had no single interest. He began to pull himself together, to fight with this intolerable state of misery, to think things out.

At first he told himself that he ought to be ashamed of the passion that tore him. But however often he told himself this, however many precepts and maxims raised their voices in support of it, although he linked up the Flesh with the Devil, even as he had been taught, still the fact remained that of it he was not ashamed.

Of his murderous hatred of Copper Top, of his weakness, of his tears, poor boy, yes. Of his passion, no.

He sat for long hours, high up among the grey rocks, where the wind blew keen and cold even in June, and

wrestled with all that went to the making of that which was Don MacClean. There stirred in his blood age-long memories. Once—more than once—again and again—he had fought for his mate—the mate he had desired. Fought and died. Fought and killed. It was a good way. A straight issue. His blood moved to it still. To the Victor the spoils. To the Race the issue of the better man. And the mate understood. The mate followed. Yes, a good way. He was not ashamed. No, by God, he was not ashamed. He flung all effort after shame from him, and gloried in his passion. Though it scourged and burnt and devoured him, yet it was the greatest thing that he had ever known. And with that knowledge courage returned to him. It was the greatest force in the world. He would fight with it for his mate. Even as long ago he had fought. To the strongest the prize. He would fight.

In a strange exaltation of spirit, he put from him his despair, his weakness, his rage. He would go back to Ishtar, and fight for her.

He stood high on the hilltop. The winds tore round him and the curlews called. His passion chanted some great song in his blood. It was Life. It was Power. He would go back and fight. He tossed his challenge to the brooding clouds. Out of them Ishtar's face shone like a listening star.

And so Don went back.

In the meantime Copper Top faithfully, if unwillingly, kept his promise and followed Ishtar to London. He stayed at the Condors' town house, the straight soot-darkened mansion at the corner of Bargrave Square. In the middle of the square, fenced in by high iron railings, plane trees had manfully put forth their yearly wealth of leaves, and in prim beds of curious coloured mould late



spring flowers still lingered. He had a fellow-feeling for them, also a deep admiration for the manful way in which they struggled with such very trying circumstances.

"There will always be the gardens for you when you find the house too close," said Lady Hawkhurst. "There is a gate almost opposite. You must have the key. Keep it in your pocket because no one else ever uses it."

But Copper could not sit in the gardens. He felt more than ever as if he were in prison. The worn patches on the grass, the naked grey stalks of the ivy, the plants with their leaves full of holes, the soot-blackened cobwebs under everything. They were all prisoners. It filled him with distress.

However, he knew that Lady Hawkhurst had meant well. Indeed they were all very good to him, for not only were they a family quite incapable of being unkind to anyone beneath their roof, but they also had a little uncomfortable feeling of duplicity foreign to their natural instincts. Nothing but their political training of generations made the present situation possible to them. And even then, it was one thing to pursue these methods for a wise—undoubtedly wise—end, against a political adversary, and quite another to employ them against a friend. So they all put the underlying motive of Copper Top's visit out of their minds as far as possible—it was not difficult in the middle of the rush and bustle of the London Season—and were very kind to him.

Only Lady Hawkhurst did not put it away. She disliked the whole situation intensely, and the more she disliked it the more determined she was that it should not fail in its purpose. She saw to it that Ishtar did the London Season, or what was left of it, very thoroughly.

"If, my dear," she said, "you have decided to spend the



rest of your life in a rabbit hutch in a wood sort of way, you may as well enjoy yourself while you can."

She saw to it also that Ishtar had an extremely good time.

And Copper Top did his best. There were odd hours, extremely difficult to come by, when he got Ishtar to himself in surroundings that did not choke him, and his interest in the extraordinary habits of human beings helped him to bear things. But oh, the glorious and adorable world of sea and sky and forest that was singing and revelling in the clean spaces of sunlight! While he sat mewed up on a bench perhaps, watching men throwing and hitting a ball, he felt just like one of the birds he had seen at the Zoo, who sat on a perch in a cage. Unfortunately, even when Ishtar sat beside him, it did not satisfy him to the exclusion of all else, as it would have most men in the same circumstances. It was certainly something that *she* was enjoying herself, and at any rate they were out of doors, under the sky, and in fairly fresh air. But the dances! He hated them. Yes. He really hated them.

He would watch, in sheer amazement, these beings as they stepped and shifted, and paused and moved on again, with a carefulness that was almost terrible. He would watch their faces as they stared over each other's shoulders, faces so anxious that they would have been painful if they hadn't been laughable, solemn, serious faces, faces of people grappling with a matter of vital and overwhelming importance. He would watch the awkward and unseemly movements of body or limb, the total lack of natural ease or grace and wonder. The music hurt him. It came to him merely as noise. The dead air, filled with the strong mingling of perfumes and bodies, with moving dust, sickened him.

"But they are not enjoying themselves! Look at them! They can't be," he said to Ishtar.

"But they must be, or why do they come," she answered. "And I enjoy it—with you," she added, and smiled divinely into his puzzled face. "Oh, Copper Top, dear, it really is lovely!"

He danced with her, but he hated it. And she thought it lovely, poor Star! If she would only come away—to his wonderful world—where he could show her—— He would dance for a little while, as long as he could bear it, moving about in his swift easy way among the shifting throng of perspiring bodies, and then he would leave her and go down to the river. The river was the only thing in this great city that they could not shut up. He would watch it flowing away to the sea and freedom, and wonder how long he could possibly bear this life, even with snatched visits to the Little House, where he and the Professor relieved their feelings together.

The little political dinners that Ishtar loved tired him even more than the dances. Through the many courses, in the hot rooms, listening to the babel of voices, he wondered at the zest with which they schemed and fought, for things which seemed to him of such small importance. He wondered at the methods they employed, recognised methods, so it seemed. To do evil that good might come out of it was so unutterably silly, was in flat opposition even to the thing they called common-sense and seemed to believe in.

He did not discuss these things with Ishtar with a view to making her see things as he did. That was not Copper Top's way. Instead he made, what was, for him, a really valiant effort to get at her point of view. But in the effort the radiant quality of his personality suffered. It became dimmed. He seemed to lose colour, as a flower will taken



from the outer light. He was rapidly fulfilling Lord Condor's prophecy and beginning to resemble a moulting bird.

Then there came a night when he stood disconsolately in the window of his airless and heavily furnished bedroom, and watched the play of the plane-branch shadows in the moonlight. He had been to the theatre. Lady Condor had taken a box at the latest thing in revues. He had stood behind her chair and gazed and listened in the greatest maze of astonishment that had yet enveloped him. Up to the present time he had avoided theatres as he avoided all places where people congregated in dust and large numbers. But Lady Condor had been so sure that he would love a revue.

Certainly everybody was laughing, but he had never realised before what extraordinary things made people laugh. And they were enjoying themselves—at least he supposed they were. Their faces were brighter than usual, and hardly anybody looked cross or worried. Yet, oddly enough, never since he came to London had he yearned quite so desperately for the freedom of space and bright mornings.

The plane branches waved gently, forming their exquisite patterns on the moonlit pavements. The moon had a look of mischief on her round face as she peeped at him between the chimneys from her spacious distance. He leant further out of the window and looked up at the little clouds scurrying in feathery haste high above him. They were in such a tearing hurry that all the stars laughed. That settled it. Copper Top gave a chuckle, the whole-hearted chuckle of a child at some pleasant thought and determination. He changed his clothes swiftly and slipped out over the window-sill. He dropped with the ease and skill of a cat on to the balustrade that



ran round the top of the second floor windows and followed it round the corner of the house until he came to the window of Ishtar's room. He was careful not to frighten her and she heard his voice almost before she saw the outline of his head against the moonlit square of the window.

She was in bed, and when she saw him she sat up, holding the sheet with both hands under her chin and looking at him over the edge with startled eyes. In the moon's rays her hair shone like an aureole of silver light round the exquisite dim oval of her face.

He laughed softly. The room seemed alive with the sound.

"Oh Star," he said, "you look like one of them! A frightened one!"

"Copper Top," in a horrified whisper, "the policeman will see you!"

At which Copper Top sat on the window-ledge and gave himself up to mirth, unrestrained and altogether demoralising.

"He will chase me over the house-tops among the chimneys, Star, what fun! I will make him lose his helmet and his truncheon and his great big boots. And his belt and his large-buttoned coat," he chanted. "And when we get to the brown earth and the wet fields he will be in his shirt and socks and his own soul. . . ."

"But what are you doing out there?" she interrupted him.

"I am going home," he answered. "To the winds and the clouds and the trees. I will see the sun rise clear and clean, and hear the larks sing. I thought you would like to come too."

"Now?" she said, amazed. "But it is the middle of the night."

"Why not? That's just what it ought to be."

Swathed in the moonlight, his figure assumed a mysterious quality. Life, mirth, and a very spirit of mischief, shone from him. Something caught her breath. The room was full of the scent of fields, of the sound of running water. Stars danced. Some sense of undreamt wonder stole upon her. She sat bolt upright. She shone like a flower in the moonlight. Oh, it would be fun. Glorious fun. Across the fields—over the hills—under the moon—— And then terror seized her. There were voices outside her door—coming—her mother's deep beautiful voice—her father's answering——

She slipped down under the bedclothes. Her heart thumped up into her throat.

"Go away. Quick!" she whispered urgently to Copper Top.

"What is it?" he whispered back. Then the voices came to him. "I'll wait. By the gardens——"

"No! No!" Her father must have come back late from the House. Her mother had sat up for him. "I can't come. I can't! I'll come down to-morrow. I'll make them let me. No—there is a rehearsal—— Oh *go!* You *must* go!"

All the full awfulness of the fact that Copper Top was in her bedroom at midnight swept over her, obliterating everything else. Her father and mother were passing the door—she held her breath.

"I fancy I'll try those carbolic injections," said Lord Hawkhurst, in that calibre of whisper calculated to wake the dead. "They positively cured Pope Rawlings so he gave me to understand——"

"I think I should try Witch-Hazel first," replied Lady Hawkhurst in the same key. "Lady Boger——"

The huge whispers died away—and Ishtar lifted her

head cautiously and looked at the window. Copper Top had gone. There was only a blank square of moonlight, and beyond it the plane branches waving grey leaves. Her father's and mother's rooms were on the other side of the passage. She heard the doors close.

For a few moments she waited, then she slipped out of bed and across the room. She leant out of the window. The whole face of the great house lay unstirred. There were distant sounds, but in the square all was still. Nothing moved save the plane leaves.

"Copper Top!" she called, softly and urgently.

But no answer came. He had gone. Away into fold after fold of misty darkness very cool to touch, until he would come to whispering woods and grasses wet with dew, where winds were sweet with all lovely and fragrant things. And she might have gone with him, moving swiftly, holding his hand through the stillness of the summer night. If she had not been afraid! She felt like crying. Why hadn't Copper Top made her go with him? It would have been so easy really—just to slip down the stairs and out of the big door. She did wish he would make her do these things that she was afraid to do. Why didn't he? Then she laughed a little at herself. Could he have made her? Would she ever really have done such a thing, however much he had persuaded her? She did not know.

The next morning she paid a visit to her grandmother at the time when she was breakfasting alone in her own room. Lady Condor never came down to breakfast, and it was only when they had something very special to talk to her about that any of her family disturbed her at this hour.

She was in a confidential mood when Ishtar made her apologies.



"I make this rule so as not to breakfast with your grandfather," she said. "Husbands and wives should never breakfast together—that is to say when the honeymoon is over. I am sure there would be fewer unhappy marriages if they did not. No man is at his best at breakfast, and even if they are not cross—eating a boiled egg, you know—I never think men with beards or moustaches ought to do such a thing in public. But men are so fond of them for breakfast—poor dear Millie Power told me her husband would drink raw eggs out of a tumbler—that was really why she divorced him—not the other things—— But where were we, my dear? You wanted to tell me about something—yes?"

"Grannie," said Ishtar, "I nearly ran away with Copper Top last night."

Lady Condor arrested her coffee cup in mid-air at a precarious angle. For a moment she did not quite take it in.

"Ran away?" she repeated. "Last night? But we were at the theatre."

"It was after that," answered Ishtar. "About one o'clock it must have been. He came to my room——"

"Your bedroom!" Lady Condor looked at the girl over her coffee cup with eyes of horror.

Ishtar nodded. She was rather enjoying herself. "He sat on the window-sill. I told him the policeman would see him. He was going to the Little House. He asked me to go with him. Oh, Grannie, I did want to. It would have been so lovely."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," Lady Condor broke forth. The full iniquity of Copper Top's behaviour dawning upon her, her mind flew about at great speed in various directions. "He must know better than that—your father—he deserves a good horse-whipping."

"Father?" asked Ishtar. But her smile quivered. "Grannie darling, if *you* are going to be angry, what shall I do? Copper Top would never think for a moment that it mattered. You know he wouldn't. He hasn't got a— a horrid thought about him. And I never thought you would have either or I wouldn't have told you."

"Well, upon my word," said Lady Condor slowly, and set her cup of coffee down at last, untasted.

"He just sat on the window-sill and the room filled with moonlight, and everything seemed wider and sweeter, and he looked like a moonbeam himself. Gran-nie"—she leant forward and her earnestness seemed to touch Lady Condor like some tangible thing—"you don't know how beautiful he is sometimes—nobody knows—except me—and perhaps 'Dophin. When he is like that if he *tried* to make me go with him I believe I should go. But he's funny that way, he never tries to make people do what he wants. But perhaps I might go of myself one day, that's why I'm telling you about it. If father and mother hadn't happened to go to bed late—they passed the door and frightened me. I made Copper Top go. But afterwards I wished I hadn't, dreadfully. If he had come back I would have gone. At least I'm almost sure that I would. And I'd hate to hurt you all like that, and you'd think it so horrible of me——"

"You must not think of doing such a thing, my dear! It would be worse than horrible—it would be madness! In the middle of the night too!" Lady Condor was really agitated. "It must have been the moon made you even *think* of such a thing. But what is it you want, darling?"

"Well, you see, at first I was so glad that you weren't all dead against it that anything seemed better, though of course I knew everyone thought I would change my mind

when I saw how impossible it would be for Copper Top to live the life we do. Only I've known all the time it would be impossible. I've always known how much I shall have to give up if I marry him. But oh, Grannie, I know too what I'll gain! His world is such a wonderful world—you never miss this one when you are with him—really with him. I hoped you'd understand." She looked at Lady Condor reproachfully. "You did say you'd have followed Grandpa round the world on your bare feet and it was the only way——"

"Did I, my dear? I do say the most terribly foolish things sometimes. Well, I might have done it too. But I'm very glad I didn't. I am sure it would not have been a success—no. It has taken all we have to pull it through as it is. Marriage isn't an easy thing. There are the people who tell you what difficult husbands or wives they've got to deal with—and there are the people who don't tell you—but every one of them is making the best of it—you've got to——"

Lady Condor appeared to have dropped into a soliloquy, interspersed with mouthfuls of toast and marmalade.

"But you older people are always trying to get us young ones married," interrupted Ishtar, "so long as we marry the people you want us to."

"Well, we have to," protested Lady Condor. "You are none of you satisfied unless you get married, poor dears, and so of course the great thing is to see that you marry the right person."

"Copper Top says you've none of you any business to interfere."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Lady Condor. "And what does Master Copper Top, who has been brought up in a forest by your Cousin James, know about it, do you suppose?"



"He's seen more of the world——"

"Not Our world, my dear——"

"And Cousin James knows more than anyone else I——"

"But in such a curious way——"

"And if you heard Copper Top talk about mating——"

"Mating!" ejaculated Lady Condor. She leant back in her chair and repeated faintly, "Mating. You are not birds, my dear."

Mating? The word was almost improper—and yet—really——

Here Ishtar, who had been contending with mingled emotions, fell away into laughter. After a struggle with her outraged feelings Lady Condor joined in, and complete harmony was restored.

"My dear, I believe we were almost arguing," she said. "And I never argue with anyone. It is one of the valuable things that matrimony teaches the sensible woman. Never argue—no—and though I am not sensible——"

"Then, darling"—Ishtar supplied her with a fresh piece of toast from the electric toaster—"why do you try to be? You are so much more your beloved self when you are the opposite of sensible, whatever it is——"

"Nonsensible of course, my dear. Or is it nonsensical? Very well then, I will not try to be sensible any more—and dear Ricky used to say my nonsense was better than other people's sense, but whichever it is—I think it is better to tell you the truth, because we have none of us taken you in with our little bit of diplomacy—and of course the truth is always the best, I suppose, though no one seems to believe it is or why do they—but where were we? Oh—yes——"

She paused and looked at Ishtar very sweetly, with love in her kind, shrewd eyes.

"I don't want you to marry Copper Top," she said. "One might as well think of marrying a—a will-o'-the-wisp!"

"Oh, Grannie! A will-o'-the-wisp isn't a real thing at all, and Copper Top is the realest thing I've ever known. If you follow him, you do get——" She paused. Where was it you got?

Lady Condor finished the sentence for her. "You get somewhere wonderful. Oh yes, my dear. When I was a girl, over in the old home, that world used to come very close sometimes. But I was alone you see—none of the boys——" She paused, old memories returned to her. "Ishtar," she began, and paused again. Finally she asked the question that was in her mind, almost in a whisper. "Ishtar, are you not afraid?"

"No," said Ishtar. "And yet—and yet I am afraid. But I don't know what I am afraid of. Sometimes I think it is really this life I am afraid of—not Copper Top's. It is this that would hurt." Her eyes grew dark as she brooded. "If I had not been afraid, for all of you, I would never have come back—don't you see—sometimes I wonder how I ever did."

"Ah-h!" murmured Lady Condor under her breath. In the silence that followed she heard the ticking of the clock, and the noise of the maids doing the next room, with irritating distinctness. How silly they had all been with their well-meant usual efforts. How far from really helping the child with the problem before her.

"What do you want me to do for you, darling?" she asked.

"I want to go down to the Castle for week-ends, like we always used to do. I want to be allowed to be in the

forest with Copper Top sometimes. I must see him and I am not going to have him back here any more. He hates it all, and I hate it for him. He'll never do the things we do, never. And you won't make me take a dislike to him because he's so out of it all, and looks like a bird in a cage." Her eyes twinkled. "So what good is it?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," returned Lady Condor, thoughtfully. "I will have a little talk with your mother, my dear. But you must not hold any more pistols to my head. I shall not tell her of the pistol," and Lady Condor's eyes had their twinkle, "but try and remember that all this has been a sad blow to her, and pray, pray do not think of such a thing as running away."

Ishtar smiled, though a little ruefully. "You're quite safe, Grannie, if you don't drive me to it. I'm sorry if I've worried your breakfast."

She stood up, but she did not go. Instead she made patterns with one small finger on the table.

"I haven't heard from Don," she said at length.

"I'm not surprised," answered Lady Condor, dryly. She was feeling uncommonly bad about Don.

"I think he might have written," protested Ishtar, still intent on making interlaced circles on the table. "I don't even know where he is. Do—do you think he minds very much, Grannie? Richard was so cross with me that I am afraid he does. And it will be perfectly hateful if he isn't going to be friends any more, like we've always been."

Lady Condor looked at her shrewdly. "I suppose you're sure it is Copper Top that you want?" she asked.

"Why yes, Grannie. You don't suppose I've worried you all like this if it wasn't?" Ishtar answered simply. "It's funny, though, how things happen. I think I did



mean to marry Don. I'm sure I did. I never thought of Copper Top—not that way. You know, somehow, he's not like that. And then I went to the Little House after the measles, and he came down from Cambridge two weeks before he ought to have, and it just happened. It was as if it had to happen. I love Don. He's ever so great a dear, and I'd be safe and happy with him, I know. But with Copper Top—oh Grannie," her eyes shone, her face flushed in its softly radiant way, "it's like living in a wonder world, and you don't quite know what you'll see next, or where you'll be the next minute! Perhaps snuggling in the heart of a daisy, or perhaps singing in a star! You won't forget——"

She laughed, kissed her hand from the doorway, and went.

Lady Condor called her maid and ordered fresh coffee hot and strong.

She shook her head over it. "What a pity! What a terrible pity!" she said to herself, and wished she had not written that voluminous and encouraging letter to Don that she had sent to post only last evening.

## CHAPTER X

ISHTAR had the next week-end at the Castle. It rained most of the time. Fortunately, in Lady Hawkhurst's opinion. Unfortunately, also in her opinion, it did not prevent Ishtar from spending every and all day up at the Little House and returning in the best of spirits.

She declared that she loved the country in wet weather, and Lady Hawkhurst consoled herself by not believing it. Perhaps there was an unconscious touch of revenge in the headache she had on the Saturday, which obliged Ishtar to make the fourth at bridge.

But it was true enough. Ishtar loved the hours she spent with Copper Top in front of the log fire while the healing flood murmured outside and the scent of wet woods and meadows mingled with the fragrance of the burning pine-wood.

"I shan't mind one bit living always in the country," she assured Copper Top in the last hours of the Sunday afternoon. She was curled up in one of the big chairs, watching him as he sat in his favourite attitude on the hearth.

"No," he half queried, half agreed. "But you can always go and stay in town whenever you want to," he added.

"Wouldn't you mind?"

"No," he answered. "Why should I?"

"But—but it will take me away from you."

"Does that matter if you want to go?"

"I thought that perhaps—perhaps you wouldn't want me to want to go."

"That would be silly," said Copper Top.

Ishtar was conscious of one of the little twinges of disappointment she so often felt on this subject, but she never could make up her mind to leave it alone. She was sure he cared for her—of course he did, and in a very wonderful way. Not like other men. But of course he was not like—— A thought struck her sharply. Did she wish he was more like them—in the way he wanted her? He let her go or stay so lightly always. Not as if he really cared one way or the other.

She pulled the thought up and slipped down on to the hearth beside him, tucked her shoulder in front of his and ran her hand down his forearm until their palms met. It was so she loved to cling to him. So she felt most fully the vital strength of him in touch with her. She looked up into his face. In the many-hued flickering light it had that strange appearance as if made of translucent gold.

"What are you thinking of, beloved?" she said.

"Fire," he answered dreamily. "It's such a glorious thing."

"I'm rather afraid of it I think. There's something so terrible about fire—so merciless."

Copper Top smiled. "It is the only one of the elements that you cannot defile or pollute. It destroys impurity and remains unsoiled. It is of itself, untouchable. It is a perfect thing."

"Do you see Fire Weavers, Copper Top?"

"Not often, and not for a very long time. Not since I grew up, I don't think. They are very great beings."

"Greater than the Sun Weavers?"



"I do not know. I do not know very much. It is better to have vision than to ask questions, my Star."

"I did see the figures in the glade. They were beautiful. They had wonderful hair like spun silk. They looked as if they were bathing themselves in the sunshine between the rains. What were they?"

"What the Greeks used to call Dryads, I think——"

"Wood Nymphs?"

"That's as good a name as any. They belong to the woods."

"That book I sent you—it is full of the woods—I thought you would love it——"

"Fiona McLeod's? The words are good. They sing. But it is a bad book. It is too full of Sorrow. I never can make out why you are all so pleased with sorrowful things—in the abstract of course I mean, you don't like them really."

Copper Top looked into the fire with puzzled eyes.

"Sorrow is not beautiful, or wonderful, or desirable, what is the good of pretending it is? I suppose it's your way of making the best of it. But I think sorrow is more like death than what you call death. It crushes life out, makes it ugly." He shivered a little. "But you like ugly things."

"Oh, darling, do we?"

"The play we went to——" He shivered again. "The man who would do anything for money, and who liked to torture. He tortured a poor wretched little clerk until he went mad and murdered him. It was an awful scene when he murdered him. But everybody clapped and clapped, because the horror was well acted. And your Court of Law—the innocent man who was turned by fear into something that was no longer a man. And these are things that actually happen—I have read the

papers since you told me to—and you like to see imitations of them—it is one of your amusements——” He stopped, then ended abruptly, “I can’t go back with you, Star.”

Ishtar clung to him with both hands, clung to him. Then she lifted the palm against which her own rested, and touched it softly with her lips. She held them there for a moment.

“No, I see,” she said. “I don’t want you to. And I will come down as often as I can, and soon the time will be over and spring will be again. Oh, Copper Top, I do love being here with you. I do love you.”

He put his arms round her, lightly, closely. It was so rare a thing that she shivered with delight. And yet it was not her body that shivered. She had strangely lost consciousness of that. Some inner centre of being was smitten as by a keen wind, was bathed in an intense warmth, was consumed by a flame of radiance—inexpressible—beyond words, swift, exquisite, satisfying.

So they sat for quite a long time, until the Professor wandered in absentmindedly and was detected while trying to beat a silent retreat.

They brought him back and throned him in the big armchair. He sat radiating satisfaction and looked at them. They were good to look at. He thought of the children to be.

“We must build on to the Little House,” he said.

The idea delighted them. They began to build all sorts of rooms, all sorts of houses, in the air. It was the pleasantest game. And then, after they had built and built, they decided that the Little House, just as it was, was the best house of all. They didn’t want it altered, not a bit. They would tuck in a room where it wouldn’t be noticed, one big room, open to the sun and the wind,

for Copper Top and Ishtar. And, after all, that did not need to be very big, because it would open out into the whole world.

And all the time, in the Professor's mind, the words kept ticking, "If only nothing happens to stop it. If only nothing happens."

Why was there no rite, swift and emphatic, which he could invoke, to marry them then and there, and no more nonsense about it. There ought to be. Of course there ought!

He watched them away, across the meadows, where Running Water and King Edward kicked cheerful heels around them, and birds gathered above. It was the loveliest evening after the rain. Radiant with elusive colours, and scented past belief. And, he thought, there was an eight o'clock dinner of many courses at the Castle through which Ishtar must sit, and perhaps play bridge afterwards, as she had last evening, to make their fourth. Condor was ridiculous about his game of bridge—ridiculous. Men got like that—— The Professor continued to grunt and mutter. Then he went on a slug hunt. It relieved his feelings.

"You really won't come to dinner?" asked Ishtar, as they went down the frost pathway.

Copper Top shook his head. "Simply couldn't stand it after this, I should be as stupid as a bat or as irritable as a cockchafer would be, if you took them in! It takes me both ways, and I never know which it will be."

He laughed, and held out an inviting hand to a wood-pigeon. The bird circled down into the shelter of his arm and crooned against his breast.

"You—you don't try and make me stay too," said Ishtar, unable as usual to resist the feeling that prompted the question.



"But you know I never try to make people do anything."

"But suppose they *ought* to do it?"

"How do I know what other people ought to do?" asked Copper Top.

"Well then, if it's something you'd like them to do very much? You'd like me to stay, wouldn't you?"

Copper Top frowned a little. He disliked discussions of this sort. He wished Star wouldn't ask a lot of stupid questions like that. But of course people always did.

"But that's nothing to do with it, has it?" he said.

Ishtar gave it up, but with a sigh. If only he were a little, just a little, like other men, she would have known better where she was. Or at least she thought she would. Don was always ready to decide and settle for her what she must or must not do. She thought Don would have decided that she must go back to dinner. But then he would have gone too. That was easy. But if it had been somewhere he hated going? Would he have persuaded her not to go, or would he have gone with her? Anyway he would——

Her train of thought stopped suddenly with her body. The stile into the road was surrounded by quite a large pool of water. The heavy rain, unable to get away quickly, had remained in the hollow at the foot of the hill.

Copper Top shooed the pigeon away and Ishtar felt absurdly pleased.

"It will be very muddy under that water," he said, and picked her up in his arms.

"Oh, Copper Top! I'm too heavy," she laughed.

He laughed too, that most delicious laugh of his, that was still so young.

"I could carry you for miles and never feel it," he said, and before he put her down in the dry road over the

stile he gave her one kiss for the dimple in her cheek and one for her rose-red mouth, and two for her starry eyes.

"When you come to me for good," he whispered, "I will meet you just here, and I will carry you over the edge of the earth, under the moon, into the Perfect Hour."

The words sang in Ishtar's heart all the way home, even all through dinner, even through the rubber of bridge, in which she revoked unashamed. They were still singing when her mother came in, the last thing, to say good night. And added to them were four other words: "he does love me, he does love me." So she did not give herself time to get nervous. She sat up in bed quickly and looked at her mother standing placid and gracious in the long streak of moonlight from the window.

"Mother," she said. "Mother, I want to ask you. Do let me marry Copper Top now. I don't want to wait like this. And I am quite sure—so there isn't any need——"

And then a dreadful thing happened. Suddenly, and without any warning, Lady Hawkhurst began to cry. Ishtar had never seen her cry before. Her mother had always moved through life serene, immaculate, irreproachable; untouched, it seemed, by time or trouble or regrets. It was like the breaking up of something unbreakable.

Ishtar watched the tears rolling down her mother's cheeks, making lines in the soft down of powder upon her still lovely skin, with something little short of terror. When she spoke the broken sound in her beautiful voice hurt Ishtar as nothing had ever hurt her before.

"I—I—don't know why these things happen to me," Lady Hawkhurst said. "I have done my b-best to bring you up well. You have a good father—you c-come of the best blood in England on both sides of the family. And my son—m-my eldest son——"

Her voice broke altogether and she sobbed uncontrollably for a few moments.

“Don’t, mother—oh, mother, please——”

“My eldest son is a Labour Candidate,” Lady Hawkhurst, recovering herself, went on inexorably. “When I was a girl no Liberal even was a gentleman. And now my only d-daughter is determined to marry a man without name or family.” She sobbed again. “You cannot even wait the decent time every girl is accustomed to wait. That is all we have asked. And you were such dear little children—such d-dear——”

Ishtar could not bear any more. The whole thing was a horror. It was almost indecent that she should see her mother crying like this, hear her talking like this.

She crept out of bed and put her arms round her.

“I will wait, mother,” she said. “Don’t cry. *Please* don’t cry. I can’t bear it. I will wait as long as you like.”



## CHAPTER XI

THE Family got back to London to find a Political Crisis of the first magnitude imminent. The war clouds in the near East had assumed such menacing proportions that it seemed impossible they would not, at last, burst into activity. A Vote of Confidence was to be moved in the House the next day. The whole political world was like a big ants' nest turned up by a ruthless spade. The number of parties bewildered the plain man in the street. There were not only Conservatives and Liberals and Labour, there were ramifications of each. New parties broke off with amazing rapidity and with kaleidoscopic changes. Ishtar found running through her mind, quite absurdly, the old nonsense words, "And there were the Jobbilillies and the Piccaninnies and the Garryullies and the Great Panjandrum with the Little Round Button on Top." But she kept this to herself, for it was, to her elders, a much too vitally important matter to be treated with anything approaching levity. They were "profoundly convinced" that only the return of their Party to Power could save the country from irretrievable disaster, avert imminent war, and restore peace and prosperity. They were ready and willing, and they felt, competent, to solve questions that had vexed civilisations since Man began. That every other Party thought the same of itself only struck them as grotesque. How could they? It was so plainly, to every intelligent person, absurd. Only Lord Condor's eyes smiled under their

heavy lids when he heard this talk. A smile that hid a worried mind.

"Just as well you should all think as you do, Paddy," he said to his wife. "Honestly, I think we're the best of the choice myself. But how we are going to cope with the mess, God knows. It wants a Hercules, and we haven't got one."

Immediately on his return to London he was sounded as to his willingness to take office again as Foreign Secretary in the event of Lord Northallerton being sent for.

"Paddy," he said to Lady Condor, "I'd give—I don't know what I wouldn't give—to refuse."

They were sitting in his library, side by side, and she laid a gentle hand that trembled a little on his, but she said nothing, not one single word, while he talked the thing out, half to her, half to himself, with silences in between. Then he heaved himself out of his chair with a groan.

"You would like me to hold office again," he said, looking down at her kindly. It was an assertion, not a question.

"I believe in you," she answered.

Lord Condor padded across the room and looked out of the window for a few moments. At the familiar scene, the plane trees, the deserted gardens, the big iron gates. A taxi had drawn up at the door— He came back to his wife.

"There was one thing the war burnt into me," he said. "And that is that the end does not justify the means."

Lady Condor waited.

"There is no place in politics for a man who holds that belief."

"I am not sure, you know," answered Lady Condor,

after another pause, rubbing her nose thoughtfully with her pince-nez, "that there is a place anywhere, in this world, for people who hold that—what did you say it was, dear?—a view, or a belief? It always seems cropping up too—even this trouble about poor little Ishtar—but you can't let some ends happen, can you?—not without *trying* to stop them—and yet the means are often so very unjustifiable—why is it? But where were we? Oh, yes! We always seem sitting on a War Volcano now, and I do think, Tony, if you are a Foreign Secretary it will be less likely to erupt—or whatever it is—than if anyone else is. You see, our present man—a dear—quite attractive though of no birth—is always doing some little thing—just from want of knowing better—that does more harm than a really big mistake—you know what I mean——"

"You're damnably right, Paddy," said Lord Condor, staring down at her. "If one's duty were only clear it would be so much simpler," he added after a pause.

Lady Condor looked up at him and her eyes filled slowly with tears.

"I could not bear another war," she said.

And in both their minds came the vision of a gay young face, a pair of fearless eyes. A remembered flash of eager life and laughter.

"I must be off," said Lord Condor with extreme suddenness. "I'm lunching with Northallerton. Fleet and Acroyd will be there. We may settle something."

He stooped and kissed her, rather an unusual thing, and she watched him pad his ponderous way all down the long room without moving.

"What is Father going to do?" asked Lord Hawkhurst at lunch when the servants had gone.

"He has not decided," answered Lady Condor. "It's



very hard on him, you know. He felt that he had retired for good."

"Well, if he refuses and Jinks-Webster goes to the F.O. we may as well prepare for the next war at once," exclaimed Lord Hawkhurst, and swallowed his coffee with violence.

"I don't believe you will get the people to fight again," said his wife.

"Nonsense! The people have got to fight if war is declared," said Lord Hawkhurst irritably. "Do you suppose John and Richard, for instance, wouldn't volunteer at once? Why they couldn't do anything else, even if they wanted to. And they wouldn't want to, and we should be horrified if they did. It's no good talking like that."

Ishtar listened with a face that had suddenly gone white. Her throat went dry. Whatever happened, or whatever anyone thought, Copper Top would not fight. And would she be horrified if he didn't? Would she be ashamed? Would— She must talk to Don about it.

And then she remembered that possibly she would not be able to talk to Don about things any more. Certainly not about Copper Top. And they had always consulted together concerning troublesome matters that might affect his welfare. Perhaps Don hated Copper Top now—— He must be angry, because he had not answered her letter, or taken any notice—— He might have written just to let her know——

Don would fight. Of course they would all fight. Only Copper Top—— And yet he was less afraid of things than anyone. He wasn't afraid of anything. And he wouldn't be *afraid* to fight. But he would look upon it as one of the curious madneses from which people suffered and he would not have anything to do

with it. And people would say he was a coward. People —— She would ask Cousin James—— He might be forced to go—Copper Top—it was too horrible. And yet men had to fight——

It was the old problem of her childhood, back again in another form. Why did things always come back? As if one were going round in a circle and not getting anywhere.

Copper Top's world receded into an immense distance, into the impossible, while she sat and listened to men and women who talked with anxious faces of War. And this was the real world——

That evening Lady Condor gave one of her celebrated little dinners. With the exception of the ladies of the house they were men's parties and after dinner more men dropped in from both the Houses and drank the admirable coffee that Lady Hawkhurst always made herself, and Lord Condor's famous brandy over two hundred years in bottles and of a surpassing mellowness.

Ishtar enjoyed these evenings. To-night it was more than usually interesting. Everyone was brimming over with excitement. The fall of the Government, the appointment of new Ministers, the imminent election, she heard all these things discussed by the men who were actually working the great machine of party politics. It was like sitting at the hub and seeing what moved the wheels round. And nobody seemed to think there would be war if only a Conservative Government were in power. She did not quite understand why this was so, but they all seemed comfortably sure of it.

"It all seems so easy, when you talk about it," she said to a very notable personage indeed, who was always particularly nice to her.

"Ah well, don't forget it's our business to talk like

that," he answered smiling. Then he looked across the room and exclaimed, "Hullo! There's young Mac-Clean just arrived. Well, I suppose I'll be turned out now?"

He smiled more broadly and with very great kindness, looking down at her, and Ishtar blushed with an intensity that was painful. (So Don was back! And he had not let her know——)

"No," she stammered. "No."

"No!" echoed the great man. (Heavens, what a beautiful child it was.) "Then I'm sorry. I like that boy. He's the sort it's good to have at your back in a fight."

And he embarked upon a somewhat lengthy anecdote about Don's father, while she wondered apprehensively what Don would be like to her now. If only he had answered her letter, or let her know he was coming. Suppose she became the colour of beet-root again. If they had met alone for the first time after—it would have been so much easier—— She wished he would come at once so that she could get it over.

And it was momentarily becoming plainer that Don did not mean, as of old, to come at once. He was allowing himself to be caught by one little group after the other all of whom had a friendly word for him. Now Richard had caught him. They were having a great joke over something. It didn't look as if he had minded—minded anything—one bit. His face bore its usual serene good-humoured expression. Now they were in fits of laughter—— What had she expected? Why had she worried herself about him? What a little fool she had been.

Her companion finished his anecdote and was swept by Lady Condor into the flood of her conversation from



a neighbouring sofa where she was enthroned. Ishtar was thankful for the respite. She felt that if Don did not come and speak to her soon she could not bear it. If he did not mean to be friends she must know at once. Every nerve in her body became on edge as she watched his aggravatingly slow progress down the long room. Her indignation grew. It was perfectly horrid of him.

At last, it seemed an hour though it was in reality about three minutes, he looked in her direction. Across the shifting crowd their eyes met and she managed with an effort what she hoped was a quite careless nod and smile.

He came to her then, and they shook hands stiffly, like two strangers.

"When did you get down?" she asked.

"Last night. I rang Aunt Marion up."

"She never told me." Ishtar looked at her grandmother resentfully. Instinctively they had drawn back behind the shelter of her great sofa. "And you never wrote, Don. I think—I do think you might have answered my letter."

"I'm sorry," said Don stiffly. "It didn't seem any good saying the usual things. They wouldn't have been true."

Then Ishtar's poor little wall of offence broke down. "Oh, Don dear, you're not going to be nasty, are you? I did hope you wouldn't mind very much."

Don laughed. The sort of laugh that hurts. "I'm afraid it isn't much good hoping that," he said. "Look here, dear, I don't want to be nasty, God knows, but I didn't know what it would be like to see you again and feel how different everything is——"

He choked on his words and stopped.

“Don, I can’t bear it if we’re not going to be friends any more——”

“I’m not your friend. I’m your lover. And I’ll be your lover until the day you marry another man, and after that I’ll never see you again as long as I live.”

He turned from her, and went away without saying good-bye to anyone, out into the night. Blindly he walked and walked, following street after street, all alike they seemed to him, rows and rows of meaningless houses, miles and miles of grey pavement. A strange, weird, endless place that went on for ever and ever. And as he went he kicked and tore himself to pieces. He had come back to fight for her, and all he had done was to behave like a brute and a fool—a brute and a fool—— The words jingled in his brain to the accompaniment of the ring of his feet on the pavement, while back in the house he had left Ishtar sobbed herself to sleep.

She awoke the next morning feeling thoroughly injured. Her main supports in life seemed gone. Her grandmother had failed her. Don was angry and hurt. They would not let her go down to the Little House to Copper Top and Cousin James. She was miserable, and there was no one to turn to.

She ordered breakfast in her own little sitting-room and when it came she could not eat it.

Then the telephone bell rang, and in a moment she knew it must be Don. She would be polite and stiff.

“Yes,” she said, and did not know how eager her voice was. “Yes.”

“Ishtar,” came Don’s voice, “is that you? Thank God!” The anxious young voice broke a little. “I just wanted to ask you to forgive me for last night and—and for not writing you know——”

She could not answer. She knew there would be tears in her voice. Her dignity struggled with her feelings.

"Are you there?" came desperately from the other end of the telephone.

"Yes."

"You must forgive me, Izzy. I've been kicking myself round London all night for a brute and a fool. I'll be your friend or any other damned thing you want. I'd be cut into bits for you dear——"

Oh, this was better! This was much better. The tears were still in her voice, they were in her eyes now, but it didn't matter.

"Won't you come round?" she asked. "I—I'm not going out this morning."

"Can I come now? Yes. All right. It's awfully good of you——"

She hadn't meant to tell him, but somehow she did.

"I cried myself to sleep last night, Don."

Then she put the receiver back in a hurry before he could answer, and drew a long breath of relief while she collected her thoughts together.

It was funny how the world could feel quite a different place all in a minute. She *must* keep Don as a friend—why they had always been friends. He could not carry her over the edge of the earth under the moon into fairyland as Copper Top could, but his was such a dear safe strong hand to hold. He understood all about this particular world of hers and made things easy for her in a way Copper Top never would. Oh, she wanted them both! Was there no life that included them? Surely there must be—— If she took the great step forward into the almost unknown wonder world that marriage with Copper Top opened to her, she must feel that behind her stood the solid safety and certainty of



Don MacClean's friendship. And of course he would give it her—he had never failed her yet—and he and Copper Top had loved each other——

So she thought while she waited for him, curled up in a happy bundle on the sofa. She had not realised before now how much she had missed him. When you were in Copper Top's world you seemed to forget everything else.

Then the door opened and Don came in. The night had left its marks on him, such as her child's cry to sleep had failed to leave on her. His face had a curious battered look, the corners of his mouth quivered. His eyes met hers anxiously, and then—well it is a thing that happens, and will happen, between men and women in highly strung moments—he had got her in his arms before either of them knew it, fiercely and possessively, yet with an immense and enveloping tenderness.

There was nothing to be done. For the moment they were as one flesh with one current of blood flowing in both their veins. Thought was swallowed up in feeling. Purely material but none the less wonderful for that. Ishtar hardly realised that he was kissing her, madly but reverently, with an ungovernable passion that yet *was* governed by an indescribable worship. She felt the moment as a wonderful whole, and it was as much as she could feel. She returned nothing. She simply absorbed his passion, lying unresisting in his arms. When he loosed her, he was as white as a sheet and shaking in every limb, but she stayed just where he had put her down, her eyes on his, her lips apart, panting.

"I ought to be shot, Izzy," he said at last, very simply.

She moved away from him then. She began to think again. She was engaged to Copper Top and she had let another man kiss her. Kiss her like that. She wasn't

safe any more with Don. It was a dreadful thing he had done—— And she had not tried to stop him—she had not thought of stopping him—she—she had *liked* it——

Don was speaking again, and she stood there like a troubled child, listening, but she did not know what he was saying. An overwhelming thought had come to her.

“So it’s like that?” she said.

“You didn’t know?”

She shook her head. “No. Not like that.” And still she looked like a troubled child who is ashamed.

“Well, it’s like that. That and more,” said Don slowly. “I’d better go away, Izzy. It’s the only thing—I can’t go on being friends—you see that now. But I’ll come back when I can stand it. I’ll come back and fight for you—until it’s too late to fight. Only you need not be afraid I’ll behave like I did just now—unless——”

There was a pause while they looked at each other, wide-eyed and breathless.

“Izzy.” Don took a step towards her. There was a desperate earnestness in his strong young voice. “Are you quite sure?”

She put out her hands to him with a cry. “Oh, I want you both. I have always wanted you both. Is there no way——”

“No,” said Don sternly, “there is no way. Don’t you know that now?”

That Don should speak so roughly to her seemed the most impossible thing of all that had happened. He had never spoken roughly to her before in all their lives, even when they were small children. Where was the old Don, and what was this she had found in his place? And yet—and yet——

“Don’t be angry with me,” she said.

“I’m not angry,” protested poor Don. “It’s you that

have the right to be angry with me. Only I wish you would understand——”

Ishtar regarded him for a moment in silence, and the blood moved with an ever richer radiance in her face. Then she spoke slowly as one who catches a new thought.

“Yes, I think I do understand,” she said. “I think I understood just now when you——” she hesitated, then went on bravely, “when you kissed me. But I did not know for a minute—I’ve been dreadfully stupid, Don. I must have hurt you so much.”

And then she did a very sweet and gracious thing. She went to him and took his hand and kissed the palm of it. It had been their childhood’s form of apology, being easier than saying you were sorry.

After that Don went away, and she sat alone for a long time. Hardly thinking, only conscious, vaguely and elusively, of something that she could not hold securely for a moment.

Her body felt like one great rose of flame. It was a wonderful feeling.



## CHAPTER XII

THE political crisis ran its appointed course, and the men who had floundered in it out of their depth, wriggling their way through the intricate mazes of diplomacy, perverting or withholding the truth when it seemed to them necessary, justifying the same to their conscience by the expediency of the hour, shook themselves like dogs coming out of dirty water and took stock of the results achieved.

The Government had fallen. A new Prime Minister was promising Peace and Prosperity. As usual, every vexed question was to be settled, though exactly how did not appear. There was to be a General Election in November, and each Party (they increased in number with every passing week), was assuring the electorate that nothing but their return to power could save the country from disasters of every possible and impossible description.

A Conservative Government was in at the moment, and it seemed highly probable that they would gain a sweeping majority at the polls. The Labour Party had issued a Manifesto of such a determined and atrocious character that Lady Condor exclaimed, "They are delivered into our hands." The Liberal Party was, at the moment, what is called in political circles "utterly discredited." The Ramifications were too small, and squabbling too violently with each other, to present any danger. Lord

Condor was Foreign Secretary. The war cloud had, temporarily at any rate, dispersed, largely owing, so his family could not help thinking, to his appointment. Lord Hawkhurst had, in Fairbridge, what was still a perfectly safe seat. And Lady Condor talked and beamed and entertained with a delightful and amazing expansiveness.

The crisis thus happily over, Ishtar's love affairs emerged again into the Family consciousness. But Ishtar had retreated into a more than usually reserved shell. Even the little feelers put out by her grandmother failed to draw her forth. Don MacClean had returned to Storne, but on the other hand Ishtar had remained in London over the crisis week-end without protest. It was well on into July, and the first week in August they would all go to stay with Don as usual. Lady Condor and Lady Hawkhurst decided to leave well alone, though had they been less fully occupied with other matters the girl's attitude might have struck them as one to cause anxiety. The pathetic quality of her beauty was more than usually apparent. She went about a great deal and acted like any other young girl enjoying her first season, but all the time she was fighting a hard and silent battle of the soul alone and unaided.

All those to whom she was accustomed to turn for help and counsel were prejudiced in this matter, even if they could have understood her difficulties. All had their own particular axe to grind. She could not trust any of them. Worst of all she could no longer depend upon Don. In this, the most terrifying moment of her life, torn between two emotions, neither of which she understood, unable even to fathom what she really wanted, she stood absolutely alone.

Since her last interview with Don she had been conscious of an unrest, of a longing, undefinable yet

all-embracing, that was new to her, and that burnt within her like some strange fever. Yet the vision of the glorious freedom that belonged to Copper Top's world, that world into which, through him, she had indeed begun to find access, drew her still as surely as ever, and with an equally strong desire. Between the two she was rent in pieces; she could not satisfy both and she did not know which was the greater.

In the daytime the numerous parties and functions served as an opiate, but every night the combatants were lying in wait for her, ready to start again, and in some dim region of consciousness that lay between the two, she was afraid, terribly afraid.

Sometimes she would make up her mind to go down to the Little House and tell Copper Top of the travail of mind and body in which she laboured. But always she knew that he would decide nothing for her. The words he had said came back to her again and again.

"I cannot hold you. I cannot keep you. You must come of yourself and stay of yourself. There is no other way."

Besides—how could she tell him——? How could she tell him of that wild embrace which she had not resisted—had not wanted to resist—and of which she was now so hideously ashamed?

Also she knew that if she went there again it would have to be to stay. It would be making her decision for good. And she could not face it. Fear held her—a deeper fear than that of hurting all these dear people whom she loved and who loved her. For through these days she was becoming more and more aware, that if she went so, if she really slipped through into Copper Top's world, she could never come back to her own. Never. Never. It would be shutting out for ever all the



future that had been laid for her in the past through long generations, foregoing everything that precept and example had taught her a woman should look for in life. It would be shutting out the warm comfortable safety, the protection so dear to her, all that the warm nursery had stood for in her childhood, in contrast to the wonderful, yet terrifying, freedom of the forest.

And above all it would be giving up Don—not the old Don—but the new Don——

There were times while she stood by her window in the moonlight and watched adventurous stars peeping at her among the chimney-tops, when the urge to Copper Top became so strong that she almost made up her mind to go. For an amazing moment all the wild white wonder of his Free World would become visible to the eyes of her soul. She would surely go. And then she would know, just as surely, that she could not give Don up. She could not part with this strange longing, sweet and cruel at once, that burnt her like a fever. She was ashamed of it. She tried to stifle it, to refuse it admittance; but there were times when it flared up and consumed her body and soul, and she knew that she could not give it up—she could not give it up——

And she would creep away from the stars to rock to and fro in a little crouched heap with her face hidden between her hands.

“I love them both,” she cried to herself. “I love them both. I can’t give either of them up. I can’t—I can’t!”

“The child isn’t looking well, you know,” said Lady Condor to her daughter-in-law, quite suddenly one morning, when Lady Hawkhurst had disturbed her at the breakfast hour with some little bit of political news that justified the intrusion.

The remark, timed as Lady Condor's so often were without connection to the matter in hand, caused Lady Hawkhurst to look vaguely round the room and repeat, "The child?"

"Ishtar I mean. She has had a queer look about her the last few days. A sort of strained look—as if she were holding something down——"

"These engagements that are not engagements are very bad things for a girl," said Lady Hawkhurst. "I was always against it really, as you know, dear. We ought to have refused our consent absolutely, and sent Ishtar abroad—or something. Though of course in the middle of her first season it would have been very annoying——"

"Nonsense, my dear," interrupted Lady Condor rather sharply. "Fifty years ago you could have sent her away, or locked her up, or married her to somebody else—or was that a hundred years ago? Time does go so quickly; why, even I remember wearing a bustle—such a curious fashion—the Fenwick girls made theirs out of newspaper—they were terribly hard up always—and Cora dropped hers running to catch a train—at Waterloo station I think it was—and some man would pick it up and follow her with it, poor thing, and why anyone should ever have thought of accentuating—but where were we? Oh, yes. The child! I haven't had time to really think about anything until last night—but at the Milchesters—she looked like some sort of lovely ghost—if ghosts can be lovely when everyone is so afraid of them—perhaps it isn't what I mean—but you know. And I began to think back. I was talking to that dreadful man—what is the title they've given him—he made his money in a Circus—or was it Circular Tours——? Something that goes round, I know. And he had to pay

£50,000 for his peerage. He thought I was asleep, so I was able to have a good think, and I tracked it down to that time when Don came, just for two days, you remember. It's ever since then. She has never come in to have any of our little talks. Don never had a talk with me either—something happened then——”

“Yes?” interrogated Lady Hawkhurst weakly, her slow-moving brain struggling to separate the grain from the chaff in this long discourse.

Even while she struggled Lady Condor completed her bewilderment by adding, “I really do want a complete rest after all the anxiety we have been going through.”

“I am sure you do, dear,” she answered. “Fortunately it is only two weeks and three days, I was adding up this morning, before we go to Scotland. I shall be glad of the change myself. It has been a trying season,” she added, and sighed.

Lady Condor's eyes twinkled. She loved to spring surprises on her daughter-in-law.

“I propose to go at once—that is to say, on Friday,” she announced.

“On Friday!” Lady Hawkhurst gasped. “But—but there is——”

“No! No!” Lady Condor waved two protesting hands. “Don't tell me! I don't want to know. I mean to go whatever there is!”

And she sat and enjoyed herself while Lady Hawkhurst was evidently running over in her startled mind all the important engagements which she thus lightly proposed to break.

“I will take Ishtar with me, if you can spare her,” she said at length, and bubbled over into one of her delightful fits of laughter.



Light began to dawn upon Lady Hawkhurst.

"Oh!" she said. And then "Oh!" again. "I see—— Then you think——"

"No, I don't think. I get so dreadfully muddled when I think. Most people do, you know——only they won't believe it. I'm acting on an inspiration, my dear. If I began to think it would evaporate—and then perhaps I shouldn't go—I should begin to think of dear darling Copper Top—and whether I was playing cricket—though why cricket more than any other game?—why not football? But where was I? Oh, yes! Thinking always makes me stupid—and I am not naturally stupid—no. So long as I don't think I can be quite clever——"

She rose voluminously among her laces and ribands, scattering opened letters and envelopes around her, and Lady Hawkhurst kissed her warmly on both cheeks.

"You are the dearest and cleverest woman in the world," she said. For she had at last arrived at what Lady Condor had been talking about.

"But, dear Connie, I am not at all sure that I am doing right——"

"I am!" said Lady Hawkhurst, with a fervour of conviction that left nothing to be desired.

There are times when we feel that if we remove our physical bodies to another, and especially a distant place, that it will also shift our emotions into some possibly more amenable condition, so curiously do we get things muddled up in our ignorance. It was probably some such feeling, only vaguely understood, that prompted Ishtar to seize with eagerness the suggestion that she should go with Lady Condor. Also it seemed an easier thing to meet Don than to meet Copper Top, and life without either of them had become unthinkable.

The rush and bustle of the hurried departure was, too, in a way, a relief. Before she had time to change her mind, or, as Lady Condor would have described it, get muddled, she was lying in one of the first-class sleeping compartments of the night train to Callender, and fell asleep almost at once from sheer exhaustion.

The clank of the train remained with her, clanking, clanking, steadily, steadily, until gradually it became the throb of a great Ocean Liner out at sea. It carried her on and on, endlessly, for ever and ever. It was never going to stop, never, never.

And then it did stop, and she was in some great strange country all by herself. She was thousands of miles away—thousands and thousands of miles—across sea and wind—across space and time—away from everything and everybody. And she had done it herself—of her own free will and accord—in some strange time of madness that she did not remember—yet she had done it. And she could not get back—not for thousands of years—across sea and wind—across time and space. She cried and cried in an agony of despair and desolation and terror, and there was no answer anywhere in all the wide awful world. She cried and cried, and it went on for ever and ever. It was never going to stop—never——

And then the clank, clank, of the train began again, and she woke up to find her face drenched with tears, and the sunlight glancing coming and going through the slit of the blind over the little window beside her bed.

She sprang up and drew the blind and flung the window wide. Outside the great hills of Scotland slept in their crowns of mist.

Don was not at the station to meet them, and Lady Condor felt pardonably annoyed. They were giving him every chance, and he was throwing them—literally

throwing them away. He had always met them before, and now, just when it was so important—it was most extraordinary. And she had no one to whom she could relieve her feelings. Ishtar was looking more like a ghost—or whatever it was—than ever. Really, if it went on she might even lose her looks.

Lady Condor was certainly very tired. She not only felt depressed, she actually felt irritable.

The car raced along above the little blue lakes that lay like a chain of turquoise in the valley. Silvery streams flashed and sparkled among grey stones. All around the heather glowed, and scented the keen air. The big gates of Storne swung open and they passed in and on through fir-woods, through stretches of bracken and heatherland, through green sward spaces where mighty beech trees kept royal state.

It was a glorious place.

The old grey house stood high, and alone. No tree or bush or flower invaded its grim solitude. Four-square to all the winds, surrounded only by grey sweeps of pebble and close-clipped turf, yet it welcomed them right graciously in the sunshine, as it had, in its time, welcomed many a royal monarch.

And then Lady Condor forgave Don. She more than forgave, she acclaimed. For Don waited in the huge stone doorway as the MacClean of MacClean—waited as his ancestors had waited before him, to receive their kings and their brides.

She retired thankfully to her bedroom and the ministrations of her maid, congratulated herself upon her tactics, and made a most excellent breakfast. If she had had any misgivings they vanished like the mist wreaths on the hill.

She dropped into a peaceful slumber. Poor dear



Connie—yes—a rabbit hutch in a wood—most upsetting—poor dear—what a mercy. So she drifted into well earned oblivion.

Ishtar and Don had breakfast together in the small dining-room, pleasantly full of sunshine and sweet with the scent of a bowl of magnificent roses. For Storne had a great and justly celebrated garden at a respectful distance from the house, walled and gated against rabbit and deer.

And Don was the old comfortable matter-of-fact beloved Don whom she had always turned to and depended on. Only there was something added, something exquisitely pleasant, that touched reverence, in his care of her. She began to recover her equanimity—began to feel the foundations of her world safe beneath her feet once more.

“I love you in your full canonicals,” she said, her eyes able to smile naturally and comfortably at him across the table. “It’s a lovely dress. I do think it was nice of you to put it on for us.”

“You,” corrected Don calmly.

He did not add that it was so the MacClean had always honoured his bride as well as his king, but there was a glint in his eye which caused Ishtar to return hers to her plate and stir the cream into her porridge with rather elaborate care. Then she collected what courage the past two weeks had left her.

“Don,” she said. “Do you think you could be my friend again, just like you’ve always been, for a little while? Because I’ve got things into a muddle somehow, and I’m trying to straighten them out.”

She looked him bravely in the face, but her underlip gave its little quiver, and it hurt him to the heart.

"Why of course I will, Izzy," he said, almost tumbling over his words in his hurry to assure her. "And look here, I think it is most awfully good of you to have come. I know I don't deserve it. But you needn't be afraid. I promise you."

He came round the table and took away her plate of porridge.

"You've let it get cold and horrid," he said in a very matter-of-fact voice. "I'll get you some hot coffee, and how about some grilled chicken? And you've jolly well got to eat a good breakfast."

Thus was the old Don for the time being most reassuringly back again, and in the days that followed he kept to his rôle well and faithfully. If those banked-down fires of his flared fiercely under the surface, outwardly he gave no sign, save that of an ever present care and thought for her. Fighting for what seemed his very life, for all that mattered in heaven or earth, Don encompassed her silently and gently with a passion of protective possession such as few women could have resisted.

And Ishtar ceased to struggle and drifted down the pleasant hours thankful for the respite. Perhaps things would straighten themselves out. She could not fight any more. Presently perhaps she would be able to talk to Don about it all and he would help her.

Lady Condor, having played her master stroke, left well alone and took her really needed rest, though not with an altogether clear conscience. Yet if ever the end justified the means here was surely a case. Poor darling Copper Top! The more she felt she was treating him unfairly the more she liked him. But his very charms made him so wholly unsuitable as a husband. It was indeed almost impossible to consider him in the aspect

of a married man in any proper sense of that responsible position. Also she felt it was purely a matter of conjecture if he was really in love, properly understood, at all. As to picturing him as a family man—well—Lady Condor found it simply impossible. It was certain he would bring up children after no conceivable method yet tried among civilised peoples. And James would have a voice in the matter. Even Lady Condor's imagination reeled. No, the whole thing was too plainly impossible to be thought of. It seemed incredible that with a girl of Ishtar's type, brought up by poor dear Connie too, it should have to be thought of. If Copper Top were ever to marry it would have to be with some strange elemental creature like himself, picked up by somebody like dear James from—— Where did Copper Top come from? Well, of course, that quite settled it, anyway.

And Lady Condor's conscience felt that it really had no need to prick.

Don's conscience, however, being of a less malleable order, made itself more continuously a nuisance as the days slipped by. Under the circumstances it might very easily have been quiescent, but it was not. After those first awful days Don's warm affection for Copper Top had reasserted itself and a more reasonable attitude of mind taken the place of that rush of primitive rage and hatred. Don did not like to remember it now, indeed he was honestly ashamed of it. It is not very pleasant to know to what depths we can descend when our slowly built house of the spirit has to withstand the primeval forces of our nature hot from some hidden and unsuspected furnace. So far are we, as yet, from that Great Achievement of which they shall be the understood and controlled driving power.

All this being so, Don's very sound and straight con-



ception of friendship could not comfortably square itself with the present situation. Until Ishtar was actually married he meant to fight for her possession with every weapon he possessed, but, the feeling grew day by day, he did not like doing it behind Copper Top's back.

Of course, putting himself and all it meant to him on one side, it was unthinkable that Ishtar should marry Copper Top—of course it was. He had not the smallest shadow of doubt on that score, any more than her family had. But at the present moment Ishtar had promised herself to Copper Top, and Don knew it, and Copper Top trusted Ishtar. Undoubtedly, too, he trusted Don. And he had behaved jolly well. Had left Ishtar an extraordinary freedom, had not urged or persuaded her against her own judgment or the judgment of her people. He had, in fact, behaved in that big impersonal way he behaved over everything.

The more Don realised this, and he and Ishtar were dropping gradually and naturally into their old confidential relations, the more whole-heartedly he disliked what seemed like going behind Copper Top's back.

Yet he could not speak of this to Ishtar. He was beginning to understand a little the situation in which she stood and he was filled with a passionate desire to save her all the pain he could. Also he found it impossible to say anything on this subject without breaking his promise to return to the terms of their old friendship during her visit.

It was useless to speak to Lady Condor, for she must have summed up the whole case, and given her verdict when she brought Ishtar to Storne.

He thought of writing to Copper Top, only to realise

that it was not his business. And Copper Top must know—surely he must know—and yet he made no move—no attempt to fight for his own hand. Could he really care? Was not his attitude altogether too impersonal? He could not love her as Don himself loved. And that being so was it not an added reason why Ishtar must not be allowed to marry him? And, after all, it was only Ishtar that mattered.

In the meantime Lady Condor wrote voluminous letters to Lady Hawkhurst.

“Everything is going well—dear Don is simply tremendous—it is impossible that *any* girl could resist *such a courtship*. It is so beautiful I feel like crying. I eat and sleep and say nothing, and feel like Machiavelli and Bismarck and Lloyd George rolled into one. Sometimes I think they forget I am here—the darlings—but when he remembers dear Don is quite perfect to me. I cannot think how Robert MacClean ever had such a son, with such manners I mean, and she was such a dull woman. He proposed to me, before he married her of course, in a fearfully sudden way without any previous attention, not even a box of chocolates, in a highwayman demanding your money or your life sort of style, and when I refused him, as of course I did—it would have been like marrying a Stone Quarry—he only said he wondered I was such a fool. Of course even Mentmore is not to be compared to Storne, it is a magnificent place. Ishtar is too lovely—what a mercy dear Don is like he is. It is so fortunate he wears his kilt here—it is so very picturesque, and of course Copper Top in his woods is terribly attractive, so that it requires something of that sort. The more one thinks the more impossible it is that Ishtar should live that rabbit hutch life; but I do not think we need be anxious any more because I really think she is in

love with Don all the time without knowing it. I have noticed several things *which point to that*, and I have had a good deal of experience. If you go down to Mentmore next week-end please tell Tomlins to get some Sweet William plants. I enclose a list of sorts. They have borders of them here two feet wide like crimson velvet ribands, and do try and see poor darling Copper Top, and be *very nice to him*, but I think it will be best to avoid *Cousin James*."



## CHAPTER XIII

THE very next morning, so it happened, she received a letter from the Professor. It was a violent letter, worthy indeed of his glorious youth rather than of his sober years. In most excellent English, with due care that every word should bear its full and perfect import, he had given her therein his considered opinion of her behaviour.

“Upon my word!” exclaimed Lady Condor, and laid the document down with the extreme tips of her fingers upon the little table at her side.

She was sitting in a comfortable basket chair planted on the grey pebbly gravel outside the conservatory, and had been basking peacefully, until Don had brought out her post, in the warm late afternoon sunshine. It was that pleasant hour before the dressing-gong sounds, when one feels justified in doing nothing at all after a well-spent day. The very last hour to receive a disturbing letter. They belong, in the just order of things, to the breakfast table.

“Upon my word!” exclaimed Lady Condor again, and Don, who had seated himself in the second basket chair, looked at her enquiringly. He had, of course, recognised the Professor’s handwriting on the envelope and he was aware of a lively curiosity as to its contents. But Lady Condor did not indulge it. Judging by the little smile which began to twitch the corners of her mouth

the humorous side which belongs to everything, even a rude letter, had dawned upon her.

"An impossible man," she said, and chuckled.

Now when two people are thinking, and have been thinking for some time, on very similar lines, sooner or later, if they are alone together, those thoughts will out into words, whatever intentions they may have to the contrary.

"One would think," said Lady Condor, looking reproachfully at the Professor's letter, "one would think that I was a thoroughly unprincipled woman."

"I know," answered Don, and with those two words of apparently not very polite acquiescence, he and Lady Condor entered into a full understanding of each other's feelings.

"I had really made up my mind not to interfere any more, dear Don," Lady Condor went on, her eyes still upon the letter, "but to—well, to leave things in your hands. But I don't think this state of affairs ought to go on any longer than we can help—I feel rather like a moth must feel, you know, blundering about in the dark—no, it's the light of course—but you know what I mean."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Marion. You've been awfully good to me, and I've never even thanked you for the letter you wrote after—after it happened."

He paused, and Lady Condor held her tongue, wisely but with difficulty, while he rescued her parasol from Betty the spaniel and drew various elaborate patterns with the point of it in the gravel. She was rewarded by a full confidence.

"You see," he said at length, "it's like this. I—I lost my head in London. I was pretty well mad, I think, and I behaved like a brute. It was awfully good of Izzy to come up here at all—and I promised her the very first

morning that I'd be like I've always been—friends, she calls it." Don laughed a little, rather shakily, and flung a fair-sized stone that he had dug up scudding viciously down the wide grey drive. "I've never been her friend. I've been her lover since I can remember—and I'll be her lover till I die," ended poor Don savagely.

Lady Condor was conscious of a tingling sensation at the back of her nose. She felt deliciously sentimental. Don fulfilled her ideal of a lover completely. And again the thought recurred. Was Copper Top really in love at all? This time she put it into words.

"He's such a queer chap," answered Don. "It doesn't seem to me as if he could be. But there's something about him you can't get hold of—something unsubstantial somehow. He's impersonal in an extraordinary way. He never seems to look at things from the point of view of how they affect him," Don went on, unconsciously echoing Charles Pendlebury. "But you can't be like that if you love a woman."

He looked at Lady Condor, his smooth young face drawn with intensity of emotion.

"No, I really don't see how you can," she replied, and added briskly, "besides, no woman wants to be loved in that way. Certainly not a girl who has been brought up as Ishtar has been."

"But if she loves him——?"

"I don't believe she does," Lady Condor assured him, more emphatically perhaps than her belief warranted, in response to the appeal in his honest, desperately-anxious eyes. "It's some different attraction he has for her. Something to do with Freedom and Adventure and a whole wonderful Other World of some sort to which poor darling Copper Top seems really to belong and not to our world at all. I'm afraid she gets all that sort of



thing from my side of the family. A little Irish blood is very useful, it gives charm, but you never know how it will mix—or what curious—what do they call them—foreign bodies—there are in it. I remember my cousin Marcus—— But where were we? My dear, I do not know if I am doing right or wrong in telling you—but I am sure you are the right husband for Ishtar—and—” here a really brilliant thought dawned on Lady Condor,— “if she marries you it will be quite simple for her to keep Copper Top’s friendship if they are neither of them in love with the other—and that I can’t help thinking is the real solution though the idea has only just occurred to me—but those sudden ones are generally right. But where was I? Yes, that is the solution of the whole difficulty. The child wants you both—she has always had you both—you satisfy different sides of her—you know I have always rather sympathised with that woman in the Play—what Play was it?—who wanted two husbands. One for her serious moods and one——”

She stopped suddenly and looked at Don with her comical expression of a child who has betrayed some naughty secret.

Don laughed. It was really a relief. But there was grim earnestness at the back of his reply.

“She can’t have me for a friend if she marries another man,” he said. “And I’m not sure that she can have any other man for a friend if she marries me.”

Lady Condor looked pensively out over the glorious stretch of wood and hill so exquisitely spread before her in the sunshine.

“I don’t think I should tell her so, dear Don,” she murmured, and then she joined in Don’s laugh. They were both glad to get on to the surface of things again. The repression of all signs of deep feeling was part of

their heritage, and really the way it sometimes insisted on raising a whirlwind that swept everything else on one side like bits of stick and straw was uncommonly troublesome and disconcerting.

Lady Condor tore the Professor's letter into little pieces, rose to her feet, scattered them with the various articles on her lap on to the gravel, exclaimed "There now! The poor gardeners!" and announced that she was going to walk to the end of the Yew Avenue and back.

The Yew Avenue was an unusual thing to find in a Scotch demesne, for the yews were of the shrub order, holding their dark branches closely round their straight stems, a kind more common in Italy than in the British Isles. Those at Storne were over one hundred years old, and ran in two almost perfectly symmetrical lines down each side of a wide strip of close-mown, brilliantly green turf. At the end of the avenue was an exquisitely wrought iron gateway traced against the sky. The ground fell sharply on the other side, giving the gateway a curious appearance as of leading into space. Wild doves had always, for some reason or another, made the place their home, and glanced in beauty among the dark trees. Looking down towards the gateway it was easier to imagine that you were in Italy than in Scotland. And indeed the yews had been planted and the gate erected, by a MacClean of MacClean on his return from a very unduly prolonged visit to Florence, concerning which there had been no little talk and surmise among his relations and retainers at home. At any rate he appears to have kept his own counsel, and whether he made that strange avenue to the memory of some dark-eyed Italian love or not, he eventually married a Carmichael of Balnacruich, and had a valiant family of seven sons by her, who did their duty well and nobly



in the wars of that day, and all of whom died more or less violent deaths.

Lady Condor billowed across the wide stretch of lawn that led to the avenue with her hand tucked confidentially into Don's arm and talked with her ordinary vigour on all sorts of subjects at once.

On the stone seat at the top of the avenue they found Ishtar. She too had received her post, and had carried a letter from Copper Top away to read by herself. He was a letter writer of the briefest order, but the quaint wording was like himself and conveyed something of his curious charm. The Professor and Pendlebury—their arguments and the humour of them—and Copper Top's glee—the letter brought the whole *mise-en-scène* vividly before her. It would be good when she came back in September. Pen would still be with them.

He did not seem to mind one little bit that she had gone so far away. It wasn't Copper Top's way—she knew that. And of course she did not exactly wish he minded—but—but could he really care—much——

And then she came to a bit of news that delighted her so much that she forgot these niggling little thoughts for the moment. "Pen has made me write some music down. I hate writing it down. You can't get it as it really is that way—you damage it. But they say I must have a 'profession'! Pen is no end pleased."

And then came in Dr. Pendlebury's neat characteristic little writing. "What he really means is, that Nielson and Mors have accepted it, and tell me there's been nothing like it in their time. Of course there hasn't!"

Ishtar waved the letter excitedly at the two advancing figures.

"I've heard from Copper Top," she called, and Lady Condor, seeing her shining eyes and flushed face,



experienced the sensation known as having your heart in your mouth.

Copper Top must be coming—and if she looked like that about it—— Lady Condor's beautiful castles all came tumbling round her.

Don's mind, fortunately for him, did not jump with such rapidity to conclusions, and Ishtar's next shout saved him from the need of arriving at any.

"He's had some of his music accepted by Nielson and Mors. They say it's very good. Doctor Pen is delighted."

Lady Condor narrowly saved herself from exclaiming, "Oh, is that all!"

"How very nice, dear," she said instead.

Somehow or other she never could look upon music as a profession for a gentleman. She knew it was only what the psychologists call an inherited something, but there it was. "How very nice, dear," she repeated vaguely. "Of course dear Copper Top is very musical—and Charles Pendlebury took a musical something once I believe—is it a degree?—or is that only for something scientific?"

She continued to talk all the way down the avenue and back to the house, a more amazing amount of nonsense than usual, and while Mullins dressed her for dinner she assured herself that she washed her hands of the whole affair. It consoled her somehow to say this very firmly to herself, although she knew that she had done nothing of the sort.

There was a dinner party that evening composed of the various families in the neighbourhood, irrespective of age, and after dinner there was dancing and bridge. A pleasant friendly evening that everyone enjoyed. Only poor Don, who had secured a violin, a cello and a

pianist from the nearest military depot, cursed himself for a fool. The strange yearn that belongs to dance music tore his heart strings. Didn't Izzy know? Didn't she really know? He hardly danced with her at all. Measuring his own strength and weakness, he could not do it and keep his promise. And he must keep it—it was his only chance. If he didn't keep it she would never trust him again. He must keep it.

Therefore it was with a feeling of thankfulness that he watched the last car-load of his guests pant away down the drive.

It was a wonderful night, such as perhaps only Scotland can produce. A night of silvery radiance and of far clear distances. Very fair and still.

If Izzy had only cared for him as he cared for her. There was a beastly tight feeling about the muscles of his throat. That damned waltz music was still running in his head, throbbing and wailing.

"What a wonderful night," said Ishtar's voice at his elbow.

In the moonshine she was fair as a star. She was the most lovely thing God had ever made.

"Let's go down and see the view from the end of the Yew Avenue," she said. "It is nearly as light as day. Much too beautiful to go indoors, isn't it? Or are you tired, Don?"

"No," he said, almost curtly. Didn't she know? Didn't she really know? "We'll go if you like. Don't lock up," he called to the servants who were getting things in order. "I'm going down the Avenue. I'll see to it. Shall you be warm enough, Izzy?"

But he did not look at her again.

"Oh yes, quite," she answered. Warm? She was a rose of flame.

They moved across the moon-white world silently; their feet made no sound on the turf. They walked slowly, a little apart from each other.

The shadows of the yew trees lay across the grass blacker than the trees themselves. Beyond them the delicate tracery of the iron gateway guarded a world all silver white.

Ishtar drew closer to Don. Her shoulder brushed against his arm. She felt him draw sharply away. Something fierce yet exquisite stirred in her breast. That dim region of consciousness which she had feared, was awake, had taken command.

Through the gateway the silver sky stretched away into eternity dancing with stars. The river sang below in the hushed valley, the murmuring song of many waters. The air was keen and sweet in their mouths.

"It's a pretty wonderful night," said Don, in the same constrained voice he had used before.

She could not answer. Beyond the gate the ground fell sharply; so sharply that a short flight of stone steps had been necessary. Ishtar sat down on the topmost. Her knees had suddenly begun to quiver and she felt physically unequal to going down them.

"Don't be silly, Izzy," Don exclaimed roughly. "You'll catch your death of cold sitting there."

"I want to sit here," she answered. "I don't care."

He stripped himself of his dress coat and folded it beside her.

"You'd better sit on that," he said, briefly. Then he ran down the steps and moved away among the heather and myrtle bushes.

Ishtar watched the outline of his dark head and restlessly moving figure in the moonlight. The fact that he was now in his shirt-sleeves moved her oddly. For the



first time she realised something of what he suffered. Some primeval fount of mother-love welled up in her heart and mingled with the fire. The two overflowed her being. The Wonder World of Freedom, of glorious Adventure, faded like some intangible formless wraith, faint and chill, was overborne and utterly swept away. She called to him, low and tremulous. The palm of her hand resting on his coat felt it still warm from his body.

He came back to her slowly, almost it seemed reluctantly, and she watched him coming, drawing in the whole joy of the exquisite moment, with narrowed eyes and parted lips.

When he reached the steps he sat down on the one below her. He did not speak or look at her. She could see the strong jaw, the muscular throat, darkly outlined against the moonlight. A delicate wind wandered around them. It was full of the subtle scent of his body, of his thick close hair.

She put out her hands and drew his head between her palms. She felt it against her throat—her breast. Her lips sought and found his and instantly they were set together fast.

## CHAPTER XIV

"PERFECT madness! That's what I call it, my dear boy. The very idea of such a thing!"

Lady Condor waved two helpless but very annoyed hands, and glared at Don in a way that would not have disgraced the Professor.

Don rubbed the back of his head with his right hand and smiled uneasily.

"Well, you see," he began, "telling old Copper Top isn't a particularly pleasant job for Izzy, and if she thinks she would rather see him than write——"

"Very well," said Lady Condor with portentous calm. "I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Don's eyes twinkled.

"Oh, yes," nodded Lady Condor. "I know. But this time I mean it."

"No, you don't, dear," answered Don. "And I know what you are afraid of, but you needn't be." He hesitated for a moment, but eventually made his declaration of faith clearly and proudly. "Izzy cares for me as much as I care for her, Aunt Marion. It was only that she didn't know before."

"Of course I know that," declared Lady Condor. "I've known it all the time," she added, forgetting in this moment of triumph any previous misgivings. "All the same, dear Don, I warn you, don't let her see Copper Top again, not until you are safely married, and above all don't let her go to the forest."

"We both of us feel pretty badly about old Copper," said Don. "I don't see——"

"No, my dear, you wouldn't. How should you indeed. And how is one to explain things—especially to a Scotsman. Though Barrie is a Scotsman—so perhaps you would understand better than Condor, who is a thorough Saxon if ever there was one. I'm three parts Irish, and was brought up in Kerry, so perhaps it's just as well he is for the family."

Lady Condor continued to ramble about among the three nationalities, with a short incursion into Wales, while all the time odd memories of queer beliefs of her childhood—the Shee—Kilmeny—would come floating up and disturbing her sequence—if sequence it could be called—of thought. Barrie—yes—and Mary Rose. The superstitious strain in her would make itself heard. But she could not say anything of this sort to Don. It would have no effect—none whatever—no more than it would have on Condor or any other practical person. But she did not want Ishtar to see Copper Top. Above all she did not want her to go to the forest.

Then she became surprisingly and very suddenly serious.

"I suppose you realise that if Copper Top had chosen, if he had tried to make her, I mean, he could have carried Ishtar off in the teeth of any opposition we might have offered," she said with emphasis.

"But that was before——" began Don, and stopped, blushing generously.

Lady Condor's eyes gave a sympathetic little dance. "Exactly, dear Don. You and Copper Top appeal to different parts of her nature—but you both appeal, that's the trouble. And the child has had a bad time over it. Now she has got into smooth waters, is nicely and com-



fortably landing on a safe shore. If you chose to let her go back into the—the whirlpool——” Her mind refused to carry the metaphor any further. “How do you know that Copper Top will continue in the same very convenient attitude for you?” she demanded. “He may be ever so—what is it—impervious?—no—impersonal—that’s it—but he’ll be—he’ll be impossible if he lets her go now without a struggle.”

Lady Condor settled herself back with firmness in her chair. She had put it well. Yes, really well.

“And now, dear Don,” she ended, driving in the final nail. “Your blood be upon your own head—I wash my hands”—she made a graceful movement illustrative of the completeness with which she did that same washing—“of the whole affair.”

She arranged herself further into her chair and showed that she was ready for her afternoon nap. “I have come to Storne to rest,” she reminded Don.

Thus dismissed, Don went into his own special sanctum and fell into considerable meditation before he joined Ishtar in the garden. After last night he would have staked his existence on the certainty that Ishtar loved him. She loved him in the same way that he loved her. Just like that. The glory of it swept over him like a flame. But he possessed the caution of his race, and Lady Condor’s words had had their due effect. When, this morning, Ishtar had suggested that the only possible thing she could do was to go and tell Copper Top herself, and he had agreed, he had not considered the matter sufficiently. He had been over anxious to let her do whatever she wished in the matter, and whatever she thought would make it easier for Copper Top. Poor old Copper. It was the one black spot in Heaven. He wished with all his heart that Izzy had only known. He

didn't blame her—of course not—not for a moment. Girls didn't understand—after all how should they? But it was just horrible that this should have happened—because it needn't have. And perhaps Aunt Marion was right about how Copper Top might take it. Somehow one never thought of old Copper taking anything hardly. If he felt—— Don remembered, and put the remembrance away from him, hot and ashamed. No, of course Izzy must not go. But——

A thought came to him like an invigorating douche of cold water. He would go himself. He squared his hunched shoulders, drew a long breath, and said aloud:

“That's it!”

It would be taking something really difficult and painful off his beloved's poor, little shoulders. His whole will sprang to it. And besides, he had been through the same mill himself, he would understand. And now that he could think of anything but his own overpowering need, he knew that he hated quite a lot that Copper Top must be hurt. He had never seen him hurt by anything, except on that one horrible occasion when they had fought long ago. Why, he had never seen him sad! Angry sometimes, but never sad.

Somehow he could not even picture it. But to lose Izzy——

He went out down to the great walled garden and found her cutting roses in the sunshine. She pondered over each bush, considering which of its bright children could best be spared, and he watched her with his heart as well as his eyes. Then she looked up and saw him and came swiftly, eagerly.

There was no living soul in sight. They had the whole flower-jubilant world of the great garden to themselves. He put his hands behind her shoulders and held her to

him. His passion smote him like a sword so that the fear that lies at the heart of all human love gripped him. If he should lose—he had so nearly lost her——

“I shall not let you tell old Copper Top, darling,” he said. “I shall go down and do it myself.”

“You!” She looked startled.

“I’ll do it all right. You know I—sort of understand. Perhaps better than you do.”

“Oh, Don!” She clung to him.

“That’s all right,” he said, stroking the hair against his breast with strong, gentle fingers. “I think I’m glad I do know. Perhaps I would never have quite known what your love means to me—what you are giving me—if I hadn’t gone through that time when I thought I should have to do without it—all my life——”

He held her close again. He hurt her, but the pain blessed. She clung to him.

When at last he let her go she looked up at him with sweet eyes that yet were anxious.

“You know the way Copper Top cares isn’t quite the same way as we care. Perhaps it won’t hurt him like it hurt you——”

Don slipped that comforting arm of his round her, and they moved down the pathway together.

“Don’t you worry,” he said. “The one thing that really matters is that you are not hurt any more. He’d say the same. I think it would be ever so big a mistake for you to see him for a bit.”

“I wouldn’t mind seeing *him*, but I think I *would* hate to see everybody else—mother and all of them—and Cousin James—— Oh, Don, it will hurt him! He was so very happy about—about it.”

Don’s arm stiffened and fell away. His face flushed a little.



"Izzy!" he exclaimed. "For God's sake are you quite sure—you have no regrets?"

She did not answer for a moment, but looked with wide unseeing eyes down the flower-bordered pathway.

"Tell me," he urged almost fiercely. "You are really satisfied? You will not want Copper Top again?"

Then she turned and looked at him with a certain curious grave tenderness.

"You know," she said, speaking at first uncertainly but her words gathering in strength as she went on. "You know how I have always had that queer longing after some strange Freedom of which I am half afraid all the time. And you know it has always been wrapped up somehow with Copper Top. He—he can open for me the gateway into some world that I have always known was there—and always half-wanted—half-feared. If the longing comes back to me sometimes—how can I be sure—don't be hurt, Don, don't be angry with me, and oh, don't ever forget that I turned my back on it all for you. It has been hard. It has torn me in pieces. But when you kissed me that time in London, you woke up something in me—something stronger than anything else. I couldn't give you up for anything in all this or the other world. Isn't it enough? Isn't it enough? But don't forget. Promise me you will never forget. That you will always understand."

"Izzy—Izzy——" Don took her back into his arms and promised her, in desperate, broken, passionate words that are sacred. And with them they forgot everything but each other, everything but those mysteries into which we enter when we love, walking, even we, as Gods.

Don took the night mail to London. He would take the next night mail back. That would mean only one

day away from Ishtar, a very sufficiently long time. And so it came about that it was in the quite early morning that he found himself following the upward forest pathway to the Little House. Old memories came back to him, extraordinarily vivid, curiously insistent. Once before he had trodden this pathway feeling uncomfortably nervous with an unpleasant interview before him. The fight with Copper Top, which had made that interview necessary, sprang into form in his mind, clear in every detail. He saw Copper Top's face—bloody—full of rage—the dead pigeon in his arms—saw the retreating figure moving blindly—with difficulty. He heard Izzy's sobs. He stood again outside the Professor's doorway gathering up courage to go in. There was a horrible resemblance about it all to his present business. It was odd how things seemed to come back again into one's life.

And it was strange that he shrank more from the possibility of having to face the Professor than he did from meeting Copper Top. Thank goodness Pendlebury had gone. It really was rotten luck that Izzy—— Of course it was only that queer feeling she had about Freedom and all that—but it was odd. He had never even looked at another girl.

Then the thought of Copper Top's face, full of rage, all bloody, came back again and persisted. He could not shake it off. Surely he wouldn't—wouldn't go for him—no, of course he wouldn't. But if he did? He hadn't thought of that before.

There was a swift rustling of a thousand leaves, the crackle of a bent branch, and Copper Top dropped lightly in the path just in front of him.

"Hullo, old Don!" he exclaimed, and smiled joyfully. He looked most horribly glad to see him, nor did his

sudden appearance seem to surprise. In Copper Top's world things just happened.

"Has Ishtar come?" he asked.

"No," said Don, miserably tongue-tied, with all his well-arranged sentences escaping him. He felt that he was going to hit Copper Top again—as he had before—smash that gay carelessness out of his face. It was a beastly thing he had to do—thank goodness he had not let Izzy——

Copper Top's eyes suddenly narrowed. He frowned intently, observing him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There has been a perfectly horrible mistake," Don began, taking his fence as well as he could, since it had to be. "Ishtar asked me to come and tell you. Copper, I'd give my head it wasn't you we've hurt—but she made a mistake. She——" Oh, why had he come? It was horrible. He was the last person. "She cares for me."

Copper Top still looked at him, but he had ceased to observe him. He did not even seem to be listening to Don's hard-won sentences of explanation.

A curious change came over his face. It was not rage, certainly not rage, nor was it pain in the ordinary meaning of the word. It was rather a regret, a regret so vital and poignant that it seemed to Don as tangible as the bruises of long ago.

"Ishtar said 'please understand.' She thought you would understand." Don ended and waited miserably.

It seemed ages before Copper Top answered.

"Tell her I understand," he said at last. "You have been too strong for her—all of you. It is your way of loving. Poor Star."

"I wish you could have known before. It doesn't



seem as if I had played fair—only it wasn't quite possible——” Don stammered and broke down.

Copper Top made a little imperious gesture of repudiation.

“Do you think I should have fought—so that we might tear her to pieces between us?” he asked, and there was an edge of cold scorn to his voice. “I could have made her stay before. But my way is not your way. I tried to show her. But I have failed, and you—all of you—have won. I did not think it would be so—but that makes no difference. I could not have used influence—force——”

The strange, bruised look on his face grew in intensity. Though Don could have touched him with an outstretched hand, yet curiously he seemed a long way off.

The birds cried in the forest.

He looked at Don coldly, impersonally. “Tell her not to regret like you all do,” he said. “It does no good to anyone. It kills joy. Tell her she is not to care. She is to be happy. She has the right to choose—and she has chosen. There is no blame or trouble.”

His face changed—grew full of light, of an amazing brightness.

“She has known,” he said. “So she must find again. When she is not afraid.”

Then he turned and went away up the pathway. The birds flew round his head. He vanished among the trees.

Don watched him go, relieved that it was over and intensely grateful to him for the way he had taken it. What a ripping fellow the old chap was in his funny way.

He retraced his steps with his thoughts in that swiftly moving scattered condition frequent after great strain or stress. Thank God it was over! He would be with Ishtar again to-morrow. He must send her a wire—

now—before he did anything else. No—there was no doubt about it—Copper did not care in the way he did. He was ever so glad. It was a huge relief.

By the time he reached the little Mentmore Post Office he was in the wildest good spirits. The one black cloud in his glorious sky had lifted. Old Copper hadn't felt it dreadfully badly. He was sure of that. Not like he had. Not a bit. He was a good chap though. Ishtar should have him for her friend if she wanted to. He put any small feeling of jealousy away from his. Yes, by George, she should.

He swung through the gates at one of the entrances to the Castle on an errand for Lady Condor whistling cheerfully and rather more out of tune than usual. Poor old Copper! What was that curious thing he had said at the end? Of course he wasn't like other people—but what a dear—yes—presently—after he and Ishtar were married—it might just as well be quite soon——

That tremendous thought wiped out every other for the time being. It stirred his pulses into mad speed. He could have shouted for joy—like the Sons of God in the Bible. He laughed aloud as the thought came to him. Well, he couldn't shout, but he tossed his arms in the air, swung them round, and jumped the iron railings separating the drive from the field. Then he ran across the grass jumping hedge or railing as he came to them. It was his boyhood's short cut to the Castle and the run helped him to let off steam.

When he had jumped the last railing, which jump landed him in the gardens, he stopped, panting in the hot sunshine now blazing down out of a serene blue sky, and began to think again.

He could catch the eleven-forty-seven to London. That would give him plenty of time to buy the things he

wanted. His thoughts dwelt pleasantly among precious stones, and wrought gold, and pearls. Yes, he liked pearls. And there were her favourite chocolates—he would get those. And he must order another car; a light one—that she could drive herself.

He would have liked to buy up half London for her.

He strode across the gardens, found Tomlins, delivered Lady Condor's messages, and then was seized by the excellent idea that he would take one of the cars and drive to London.

He drove himself, and at a speed that should, justly, have landed him in the Police Court.

However, he did not shout.



## CHAPTER XV

COPPER TOP lay among the branches of the tallest tree, face downwards he lay, with his cheek pressed against the cool bark. His right arm, flung across his head, seemed as if to guard it from assault.

Save for an occasional quiver through all his limbs he lay quite still; quite still through all the sun-bright summer's day, and what he felt, what he thought, what passions that tear and torture the souls of men mouthed at him, clamouring for admittance through those long hours, that no man knows.

When at last he moved it was night. A great August moon in a clear sky shed radiance over the world.

He dropped down from branch to branch until he stood again on the earth. The curious bruised look in his face was still plainly visible, as a hurt to the spirit might be, could we see it. His eyes were wide, and as he looked from side to side, swiftly and eagerly, they seemed to change from brown to green, from green to blue. They flashed with a gladness of recognition. What he saw, that too no man knows, but undoubtedly he saw things unseen of man, beings that he had known, that he remembered.

They called to him, "Come back to us."

And he answered, "I will come back."

And he went on and up through the forest, and many creatures followed him.

Above, where the little stream sang all night, he stopped again, and it seemed he greeted others who met him there.

They called to him, "Come back to us."

And he answered, "I will come back."

And he went on to the great Uplands, and the creatures still followed.

High above the sleeping world of men, out in the still wind under the sky, he saw that which he saw, and knelt with outstretched hands.

"Let me come back," he said.

And down the slanting moonbeams came the welcome of his world.

It seemed he bathed in it for a while, renewing himself. Then he stood up and looked back. Back to the Little House.

. . . . .

The Professor woke early the next morning, woke with a start. Someone had called him.

His first thought, as usual, was the boy. Had he come in last night? Had he called him from the garden? He got up and padded across the room. The fresh early morning air met him at the window as he peered out into a mist-wrapped world. It was very early. Not a bird even had begun to twitter. The hammock under the oak tree hung greyly empty. No white owl kept guard above.

With that dream-call still exercising its peculiar influence, the Professor slipped into some clothes and went out into the dawn, picking up Little Wolf on his way. The little dog was too old and stiff now for the long night expeditions with his master such as his soul had loved, but this early morning wander with the Professor suited him admirably. He stood in front of him, sniffing the air with

delicate nose. Then he trotted off towards the Beech Grove, and the Professor, having no particular route in mind, followed him.

The Grove was still in the dark, and uncannily still. It was with a sense of relief, so great that he felt it was absurd, that the Professor heard Little Wolf's shriek of welcome, and saw Copper Top coming through the deep well of shadow towards him.

The bruised look no longer marred his face. It looked curiously swept clean of all emotion.

"So you have come," he said just as on that mid-summer night's eve long ago, and slipped his hand into the Professor's.

It was late in the afternoon when they came back to the Little House. All its windows blazed a welcome in the face of the sun. The fire was alight and the flame leaped up to greet them, crimson and heliotrope and gold.

The Professor sat down and held his hands to the warmth, though he was not in the least cold or tired. He seemed indeed unconscious of anything but his own thoughts. A great wonder shone out of his face. Presently his lips moved.

"God bless my soul!" he said. And then again, "God bless my soul!"

What had happened to him! Some limitation—yes—obviously a limitation—had been removed. He had experienced an extension of consciousness—so sudden as to be positively dislocating. And yet—had not his whole life with the boy been leading up to this—just this—this day of wonder in which he had not merely sensed, but actually known, come into touch with, Copper Top's real place in the great scheme of this brave Universe.

He clutched his head with both hands, and, elbows on



knees, rocked to and fro in the stress of an overwhelming rush of thought.

Another dimension—neither more nor less—another dimension of space—its denizens—some like ourselves and others quite different—higher beings because their element is higher—greater freer beings——

All those old legends, back into the dusky dawn of human thought, were not only beautiful in idea, they were clear and true as a fact. The fables of Sun and Air Spirits, of Angels dwelling in light—Messengers between ourselves and the Absolute—moving in our invisible environment—all had this simple truth behind them. Man had relegated the former to the region of myth, the latter to some impossible far off Heaven—and all the time they were here—co-existent with ourselves—moving side by side with us——

The Professor clung more firmly to his head and muttered. The ruling passion asserted itself for a moment. He would write a book—the most amazing book ever written—a book that should shake continents—because he knew—he knew—the thing had happened—had happened—had happened——

And then he groaned through all his bones, because he knew that book would never be written. Men would never believe. They called him mad now, when he told them the truth about the things they did believe in—and yet—wasn't this just commonsense after all—of course it was——

“Of course it is,” said the Professor, and lifted his head from his hands.

The boy stood in front of the fire. The scent of him was like the sun and the wind and the rain, and he looked at the Professor with impish mischief in his dancing eyes, and yet with very comforting affection.

The Professor looked back at him and smiled. There was no need for words. His thoughts moved on.

A being from these other conditions—out of a higher element—who by some strange chance—or might it be design—had come through into a human incarnation—into the limitations of a human body. How had he ever borne those limitations? How had the wonderful thing that he was ever lived within them so joyously?

And in that moment the Professor understood that the boy would go. Somehow, through the loss of Ishtar, he had remembered, had found his own world. It was no longer possible that he should stay. And in the blazing light of his great experience the Professor did not wish it otherwise. He had had his vision. He knew. For a while his limits of time and space had receded—were transcended. All the remaining years of his life, be they few or many, were as nothing compared with the hours of that wondrous day, with the timeless knowledge that now was his.

Copper Top sat on the hearth and sang to the fire, and the winds filled the room, and Little Wolf barked in his sleep, and Running Water's soft whinny came up from the field. The swallows flew in and out, and the missal-thrush sang his evening hymn from the pear tree. Above on the eaves the pigeon cooed.

So peaceful was the twilight, a benediction seemed to brood above the world.

To Kathleen in the Little House it seemed as if the child had come back. The child that They had lent to her childless breast. Was it by chance, or in frolic, or with some set purpose? She did not know. She cooked a special supper, what else could she do, poor Mistress

Jones? All the things that the Professor and Copper Top loved best, and she served it to them by the fire.

Long after she had bidden them good night, and prayed herself to sleep the boy and the Professor sat on, talking through timeless hours of hushed night.

At the dawn he went. He embraced the Professor very tenderly, and he kissed Little Wolf, who turned in his sleep, and left his little old body and followed him. He went singing through the woods, and across the downs to the sea.

With the sunrise he slipped into the great moving waters with a shout, a shout of Joy, a shout of Greeting, and swam away into the blue distances of space.

And round the garments he had left upon the shore, the sea birds flew, crying.

. . . . .

It was in the clear weather of gold September that Ishtar came and stood in the Professor's doorway.

He sat at his desk and wrote, as of old.

"May I come in?" she asked humbly.

"Come in, my dear," he said.

She knelt beside him and laid her fair head against his shoulder. The flames leaped among the logs on the hearth, the soft wind filled the room.

"You are not angry with me, 'Dophin?" she whispered.

"No," he said, and stroked her hair.

She lifted her head and looked in his face. He saw her soul through her eyes. Her soul that Passion and Sorrow had marked.

"Tell me," she said. "I must know."

And though he had not meant to tell her, yet he did.

She listened with her head against his shoulder and



her hand in his, and when he had finished she was silent for a long time. Then she stood up and moved to the window.

The tears were on her cheeks, but they had washed the sorrow from her eyes.

Outside Don waited, pacing the grass beneath the oak tree. Don had been good—so good.

She came back to the Professor.

"I chose," she said. "And I will not regret."

Then she knelt again beside him and laid her cheek to his.

"Could he have stayed?" she whispered.

The Professor looked out at the sun and the wind and the birds, and the far horizon.

"My dear, the wonder is he stayed with us so long."

. . . . .

Many people made pilgrimages that autumn to the Little House to see the Professor.

Lady Condor came, and cried a little and talked a great deal, and was very dear and kind.

And Mr. Fothersley came, sympathetic and perturbed.

Lord Condor rode up on his big hunter, and they talked together as in the long ago days when they were boys.

And poor Don came, by himself, and broke down and sobbed.

Doctor Pendlebury came often. He was busy over what scraps of Copper Top's music he had managed to get hold of. He longed to ask questions, but found it impossible.

They all wondered. Some only a little, some a great deal.

But the Professor walked ever more closely to that world of wider consciousness, and looked with ever gladder and more fearless eyes into those dim regions of space that terrify the blind souls of men.





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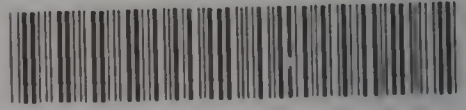






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